

THE MAN OF THE CRAG

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THE MAN OF THE CRAG

BY GUY BOOTHBY

Author of
"Dr. Nikola," "A Royal Affair,"
"A Stolen Peer," etc., etc.



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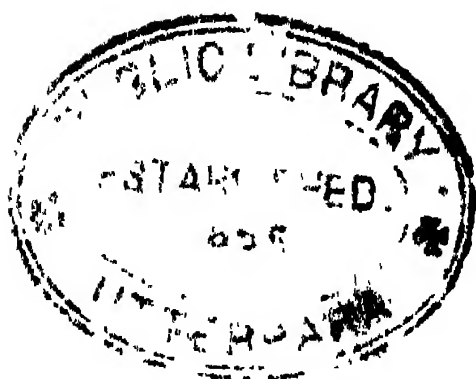
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CHAPTER I

BLESS my heart, how well I can remember that day! Though so many years have elapsed since the events I am about to record took place, it all comes back to me as if it were but yesterday. By the way, I often wonder how many of us realise the true value or meaning of Time. Day succeeds day, and night follows night, and each midnight sees another uncared-for—but nevertheless tangible—portion of our life cast aside into the dust-bin of Eternity, yet it fails to strike us that we have missed anything. Let us suppose, for instance—but there, I am forgetting myself—I did not sit down to moralise—so with your permission I will get on with my yarn without any further preamble.

First and foremost, my name is Graham Dennison, and if it is of any interest to you to know it, at the time that this story commences I was within a month of my thirtieth birthday. By profession I was a lawyer. I say "was," for the reason that I have long since ceased to practise, and for reasons which the tale I have to tell will shortly make apparent to you. There have been Dennisons in our part of Westmoreland from time immemorial, and certainly for the last century and a half they may be said to have represented the legal profession in that remote district—and, strange though it may appear, have not only represented it, but what is perhaps more important, have managed to derive a competency from it. We are a long lived race, as are so many of the dwellers in that bleak, and as some people profess to consider it, somewhat inhospitable region.

To begin with, it was a bitterly cold morning in the middle of November. It was also half-past five—which fact necessitated dressing by candle light and shaving with water that was not far removed from freezing. For some minutes I deliberated as to whether I should get up at all; eventually, however, I determined to make the attempt. How little did I dream then that that momentary exhibition of mental force was destined to affect the entire current of my after life. Some

great general has put it on record that there is no courage like two o'clock in the morning courage, and I, for one, am quite disposed to agree with him. I drew up my blind and looked out of the window. But I could see nothing. To employ a colloquialism, the outside world was as black as my hat. From the room overhead came the snores of my housekeeper, a sensible, matter-of-fact woman, who would as soon have thought of getting up before daybreak on a winter's morning in order to go hunting as she would of breaking my mother's beautiful old china in the dining-room with the coal hammer. For the first time in my life I think I envied her.

Over the details of my dressing I must draw a veil, for I fear my language at times was scarcely parliamentary. My fingers were frozen to their tips, and as is usual under such circumstances, every button appeared to be either too large or too small for its respective button hole. This in itself was scarcely conducive to good temper even in a philosopher. Nor were matters improved when I descended the stairs to the dining-room to find that my worthy housekeeper, who, as I have said, was sleeping the sleep of the just, had omitted to provide milk for my tea. By the time I had discovered it in the larder and had trodden on the household cat in so doing, to say nothing of

upsetting a basin of half-frozen stock over my gaiters, I had come to the conclusion that hunting, and mountain climbing in particular, is a vastly over-rated sport. What on earth, I asked myself, possessed them to have such early meets? Why could they not wait until midday or at any rate until the sun, always provided there is a sun—which as often as not is missing—had had time to warm the earth. To drag a poor wretch from his bed at the unholy hour of five-thirty should surely be made a criminal offence and be punishable as such.

With the unnecessary haste that a man is apt to put into such matters I bolted my tea and bread and butter, and then donning a cap and overcoat and taking a stout stick in my hand, I opened the front door and stepped out into the world. Save for the splutter of the small waterfall behind the house not a sound was to be heard. For all one could tell to the contrary, I might have been the only living being on the face of our planet at that moment. And here let me pause to offer an explanation. As I have no wish to sail under false colours it is necessary that I should do so.

To begin with I have talked about hunting, but as you have doubtless observed I have made no mention of a horse. The fact of the matter is, a horse is the last animal required in such a country.

If he were endowed with the claws of a cat, the agility of a puma, and the climbing powers of a Himalayan grey ape, it is just possible he might be of some service, but as he does not appear to possess these advantages he is useless so far as following the chase is concerned. When it becomes necessary to climb the bare face of precipices, such as would entitle one to compete for Alpine honours, it is necessary to rely upon one's own legs, feet, and hands for assistance. For us there is no crowding at gates, no racing for gaps, no daredevil feats of horsemanship. It is a question of each man for himself, and if he wishes to find his fox run into it can only be by his own unaided exertions.

The meet on this particular morning was at Mervyn House—distant some five miles or so from my abode. It was a favourite locality, and we were as certain of finding a fox as we were that old Jimmy Grayson—the veteran huntsman—would be on hand punctual to the moment and with the full determination, for he was an arbitrary old fellow—not to wait for anybody, even if it were royalty itself. He had hunted the pack for a quarter of a century, and was popularly supposed to know every rock and stone within thirty miles of the kennel gates. He was the possessor of a keen and ready wit, and sad indeed would be the lot of

the reckless individual who should attempt to be facetious with the old man. His tongue was as keen as a two-edged sword, and he was not apt to be sparing in his use of it.

Once outside my own gates I turned to my left hand and headed away along the high road in the direction of Mervyn House, a fine old mansion situated on a plateau at the foot of one of the loftiest hills in the district. The family who own it have lived there since time immemorial, but as this is the only occasion in which they make their appearance in my story, I need not do more than mention them in passing. Up to within a few months of his death, and he died at the ripe age of seventy-three, the old squire was a consistent follower of the hounds and scarcely if ever missed a meet. It was a fine sight to see him climbing the hillsides in company with his three stalwart sons and two handsome daughters, cheering the hounds on with a voice as clear as a bell, and springing from rock to rock with all the ardour and almost the agility of a boy of twenty. Alas! there are few of his sort to be met with nowadays.

Two miles or so from my destination I paused to watch the sun rise above the hill tops. Never in my remembrance can I recall anything to equal the picture I had presented to me. The stars had long since paled in the east, and now a soft grey

light was beginning to overspread the heavens, increasing in beauty minute by minute until it partook of the colours of a mother-of-pearl shell. With subtle gradations it spread across the valley—touching a patch of purple heather here—a seam of red sandstone there—flashing upon a reed-bordered tarn—and anon giving a stretch of dreary moorland a beauty that no one would have credited it with at any other time. It was a wonderful morning and I was in a position to appreciate it at proper value. I suppose even a prosaic lawyer may indulge in daydreams occasionally. I only know that that morning's dawn was the opening of a new life for me. You shall presently hear why!

Suddenly the sun himself made his appearance above the summit of the hills, and as he did so the whole world, so it seemed to me, woke to instant life. Birds flew hither and thither, a lark rose from the bracken and soared up and up into the blue dome—while in the distance I could see a hare lolloping quietly away across the fell as if there was no such thing as a hound in all the countryside. As there was still plenty of time to spare I lit my pipe and, leaning on the bank, gave myself up to a consideration of matters rural. This was my own land, the country in which I had been bred and born. To many people it might

have seemed narrow and circumscribed—but to me it was, if I may so express it, just part and parcel of my life. With the exception of those miserable three years when I had perforce been compelled to study Law in London I had never left my native county, and perhaps that was why every stick and stone, every rood of soil, was so familiar and so dear to me. My home life was as happy as any man could wish to know. Possibly my tastes and desires were easily gratified. Be that as it may, however, I had no desire to change. A devoted mother, a comfortable house, an assured income, and a very fair variety of sport—what more could mortal man wish for? He would indeed have been hard to please who should have asked for anything better. As for thinking of marrying it had never entered my head. I was perfectly content to remain as I was, and until Miss Right—if such a person existed—should chance to cross my path, I was quite prepared to possess my soul in patience and to remain in a state of single blessedness.

I was still occupied with these thoughts when the sound of voices broke upon my ear, and turning to look back upon the way I had come, I discovered old Jimmy Grayson, his subordinate, and his pack, not forgetting the four half-bred Bedlington terriers, coming towards me. I am

not going to pretend that they showed anything remotely resembling the stylishness of the Quorn or the Pytchley—for they certainly did not, but I am prepared to assert, and I don't care who disputes it that they—as a pack—would live and hunt where the more fashionable representatives of their race would lie down and die. Hardy would be no name for their condition. There was not one among them but was a mass of bone, muscle and sinew—capable of hunting from dawn till dusk, of climbing the sheer faces of precipices, and of pulling down a fox on the topmost summit of Scawfell if need should arise.

“Good morning, Jimmy,” I said to the old man as he touched his cap to me—“you can't complain that I am not up to time this morning.”

Old Jimmy, I should here observe, was proverbially hard to please. He liked nothing better than a good field, but—as I have already said—he would not have allowed any one to keep him waiting even for a minute.

“It's pla-an that ye've left yer blankets early this morn,” he was gracious enough to say, but he qualified his praise by adding—“I suppose it's the breakfast at the Squire's ye're thinking of.”

This retort was so unexpected that for the moment I did not know what reply to make to it.

“I was not thinking about anything of the

sort," I answered angrily. "You jump to conclusions too quickly, Jimmy. By the way, I see one of your terriers is lame."

I thought, I had him on the *riposte* and I was pleased when I saw that his nutcracker face wrinkled like a crab apple under the strain of it.

"La-am, is it?" he retorted, his voice rising almost to a screech—"wa-al—wa-al, I suppose folk allus will judge by 'pearances, whether they be lawyers or what not."

He gave a call to his hounds and proceeded down the road at a brisk trot for all the world as if he scorned to have anything more to do with me. I was not going to be abandoned in this fashion, however, so I set off in pursuit—and in a few minutes we had settled our differences and were as good friends as ever. Strange and wonderful indeed were the stories the old man had to tell—that is to say, when he could be induced to tell them. He knew nothing of the world beyond his own immediate district, but that little world was so engrossing, so full of interest, that it held one spellbound.

As the stable clock at Mervyn House struck eight we entered the gates to find the owner, his sons and daughters, some two dozen of the neighbouring gentry, and perhaps half that number of farmers awaiting our coming. Old Jimmy

knew everyone and had a Cumberland quip for each—as rough and ready as himself. All offers of breakfast he declined. He had partaken of his meal before break of day and would touch nothing more, save a bite of bread and cheese, until he returned to the kennels at nightfall.

“ Bless us, Jimmy, you be lookin’ as hale and hearty as e’er a one of us to-day,” said a burly farmer, who had just come up.

“ May be, may be,” replied the old man, and then with a cock sparrow like twist of his head he added—“ Ye look ’ale and ’earty yerself, Farmer Brown, that I can see, but I’ll wait till I talk to ye t’ further side of Grimshaw Pikes afore I know whether it be genuine or no. Flesh is but grass, the good book says, but mountains is mountains and they wants climbin’ as such.”

The farmer knew better than to continue the discussion. Like many another he stood in considerable awe of the old huntsman and had a very human aversion to being made to look ridiculous in the eyes of his associates. On that point I could quite sympathise with him.

“ Well,” said the Squire, when we had given the late arrivals something like a quarter of an hour’s grace, “ I think we had better ~~ge~~ to work, James ! It looks as if we are all here.”

The old man touched his cap and calling up his

hounds, with the couple of pairs of terriers, set off for the hillside, where we were confidently assured a fox awaited us. Our hopes were not destined to be disappointed, for after a couple of casts Reynard broke cover and set off at a racing pace up the mountain, the hounds following in hot pursuit. For the next ten minutes or so I find it difficult to remember what happened. The only thing which appeared to be of any sort of importance was a desire to be with the hounds if possible, and when I say that the going was well nigh as steep as the roof of a house you will be able to appreciate in a measure the difficulties with which we were confronted. Up and up he went—the hounds, now running mute, anon bursting into melody, and the wiry old huntsman always in view, one moment breast high in bracken and the next silhouetted against the sky upon some crag that at first glance appeared almost insurmountable. Away to the right the genial Squire and his family were making good work of it, but the majority of the field after the first mile began to tail out woefully. As for me, thanks to a hardy frame and a vigorous constitution, I was able to hold my own with the best of them. At the same time it must be confessed that I was not altogether happy until I had got what is somewhat strangely termed my second wind. After that I felt as if I

could go on well nigh for ever. Above us the summit of the hill was shrouded in mist, but below all was bathed in sunshine. Indeed, so warm was it that I began to regret having put on such thick clothing.

From the way in which the fox was heading it was evident that we were in for a long and stern chase—of which but few of us would be likely to see the end. Leaving the hillside on which we started him we crossed the valley and commenced the ascent of Blacknell Rise. Here the climbing became more and more difficult, but still old Jimmy, with an endurance and pertinacity that was little short of marvellous, managed to keep within shouting distance of his hounds. How he did it none of us could say, but his presence was there to speak for itself. Once more the fox took a turn to the left and then, changing his mind, commenced to descend the hill into the valley again. The hounds, now running mute, streamed after him and, scarcely knowing whether to be grateful or sorry for the change in the programme, we followed in their wake. Across the valley we went again only to discover that Master Reynard had once more changed his mind and this time was evidently heading for Raw Fell, one of the roughest and most desolate spots in all the country side. Let him but once get there and we knew he

would be lost to us for good and all. At present, however, the question was whether he would reach it or not. The pack was making excellent going over the comparatively open ground and, hill fox though he was, he soon began to find that it was necessary for him to put his best foot foremost if he hoped to save his brush.

At the end of the narrow valley he started to climb the hill once more. Hardy though he was, the pace at which he had up to that time been travelling began to tell upon him. Even to save his life he could not keep it up for ever—and the hounds were momentarily gaining on him. Fortune, however, favoured him in an unexpected fashion, for just when everything seemed hopeless—so far as he was concerned—the thick mist descended on the valley, blotting out everything, hound, fox, and field, as effectually as if they were all covered with an impenetrable grey blanket. Only a moment before all had been brilliant sunshine, now it was well nigh impossible to see a yard in front of one's face. The most uncanny part of it was the silence. It was as if one were suddenly cut off and were standing apart from the rest of the world. The murmur of a little stream some yards away to my right was the one sound I could hear. Only those who know the Lake district can have any idea of the suddenness with

which these mists descend and how dense it is possible for them to be. I can assure you it is no joke to be caught in one of them, especially towards evening, when as likely as not it may be necessary to remain in one spot all night for fear of accident.

It was in vain that I strove to locate the hounds, or to satisfy myself as to my approximate position. I might as well have tried to square the circle, or to discover the secret of perpetual motion, for any success that rewarded me. Minutes went by—possibly a quarter of an hour elapsed—but still the fog showed no signs of lifting. I dared not go forward on the chance of finding somebody, for before the fog had descended on us I had noticed that there was a deep ghyll, or ravine, a hundred yards or so ahead of me. To walk into that would possibly mean broken limbs, which in such a lonely spot would be well nigh as bad, if not possibly worse, than death itself. I recalled the stories I had heard of men walking over precipices in the mist to lie with broken limbs, starving, suffering, and praying hour by hour for the coming of merciful King Death. I accordingly sat me down on a boulder to await with what patience I could command the lifting of the fog. At last I could bear it no longer, so I determined at any hazard to move cautiously forward, feeling my way step by step and never advancing a foot until I had made quite sure that

it was safe to do so. I was still proceeding in this careful fashion when something reached my ears that brought me to a standstill with surprise. It was the sound of someone crying, and in the silence of the mist it had a peculiarly weird effect. As I paused to listen it stopped, but recommenced a moment or so later. I tried to locate the sound but found it difficult to do so. First I felt sure that it had come from my right, then it seemed to be on my left, after which it would change to directly ahead. Once more I began to advance, calling as I did so to the woman, for a woman's voice it certainly was, not to lose heart for I was coming to her assistance.

"I am here," said the voice in return.

But I found it as difficult as before to discover where that "here" might be. It was a Will o' the Wisp voice and coming as it did out of the grey silence, it was indescribably uncanny. Indeed in all my experience of fogs upon the Fells I don't know that I can recall ever hearing anything like it.

"Am I near you now?" I cried, after I had proceeded some ten or a dozen careful paces.

"I cannot tell," was the reply, and the voice still sounded as far away as ever. "Here I am, sitting on a rock. I cannot see anything and I am afraid I have broken my ankle."

This time I was certain it came from the right and I accordingly moved cautiously in that direction—still calling as I went.

“Am I near you now?” I bellowed, and in answer a voice not more than a few feet distant from me replied as before, “Here I am.” So close indeed was it that it gave me quite a start of surprise.

A moment later the person I was in search of came into view. As she had said she was seated on a rock, framed in mist which gave her a curiously ethereal appearance. It was not until I was within a yard and a half of her that I was able to see her face. So far as I could tell she was a stranger to me—which in itself was curious, for I thought that I knew everyone in our somewhat sparsely populated district. Her age could not have been more than four or five-and-twenty. She was well, I might also add stylishly dressed, in some grey homespun material, which harmonized well with the swirling mist around her. On her head she wore a neat little cap of the same material as her dress and in it was stuck a white feather that glittered with moisture as if embroidered with so many seed pearls. That she was not only a lady but a decidedly pretty girl, there could be no doubt. When I discovered her, however, her face was

racked with pain and tears were coursing down her cheeks:

"I thought I should never find you," I said, and then added, "I trust you are not in much pain."

"My ankle hurts me terribly," she answered, "I fear I must have broken it. I trod upon what I thought was a firm rock, just before the fog came down, and it turned over with me. How I am to get home I do not know. Do you think the fog will last much longer?"

"It is impossible to say," I answered. "It may lift in a few moments or it may last for several hours. Possibly this is your first experience of a Fell Mist?"

"It is, and I sincerely trust it may be the last," she replied with conviction. "Until I heard your voice I was terribly frightened. I had begun to think I should never come out of it alive. What I should do I could not think. I cannot bear to touch the ground with my foot and if the fog did not pass away there did not seem anything for it but to remain where I was and starve. Whatever induced me to come out with the hounds I cannot think."

"You must not take such a gloomy view of the situation," I said. "Since I have found you I feel

sure I shall be able to help you. Before we do anything further, however, let me give you some of this. It will put fresh life into you."

So saying I produced from my pocket my flask, without which I never go out hunting, and poured some of the brandy it contained into the little silver cup. She drank it, but not without a grimace. The effect, however, soon became apparent. She ceased to tremble, and her sobs discontinued as if by magic. But something I knew must be done for the injured limb before it grew too stiff for manipulation. A life spent among the Fells has given me an insight into a sort of elementary surgery, and this I was now called upon to put into practice. That she had not broken her ankle as she supposed I soon convinced myself, but that the sprain was a severe one there could be no sort of doubt. The ankle was very much swollen and it was quite apparent to me that it would be out of the question for her to walk even a few yards. What therefore was to be done? The only thing for me to do would be to get her home as best I could, even if I were compelled to carry her. I explained the position to her, and asked her where she lived.

"My grandfather has lately taken the place called 'The Crag,' " she answered. "And I keep house for him. It was against his advice that I

came out to-day, and I am well punished for my obstinacy. . I don't know what he will say when he sees what has happened to me. I am afraid he will be very upset, for he loves me so dearly."

"You could not help your accident," was my reply to this speech. "You did not sprain your ankle intentionally, as he will surely see."

I remembered now having heard that the dismal old mansion called "The Crag" had after a long period of desuetude found a tenant, but I had no idea of the tenant's identity. It was by no means a cheerful place, standing as it did some distance back from the main road in a wild and desolate position, far removed from any other dwelling. It had originally been the property of an eccentric old man, reputedly a miser, who had died there under somewhat peculiar circumstances. Since his death the house had remained unoccupied, no one in the district caring to take it, even at the low rental the old man's executors—a firm of London solicitors—were asking for it. To find that at last it was inhabited caused me some little surprise. I certainly did not envy this beautiful girl her life in such a house. Its dulness would have palled even upon a hermit.

Having borrowed her handkerchief, I bound up her ankle in order to give it what support I could,

and then felt that it was impossible to do more. The fog showed no signs of breaking, and at the lowest computation I knew that we must be at least three miles from her abode. To attempt to carry her such a distance—and over such rough country—would, I knew, be worse than useless, and yet I dared not leave her where she was while I went for assistance; for should the mist not clear away it was quite within the bounds of possibility that I should be unable to find her again. She must have noticed the trouble on my face and have divined the reason that produced it, for presently she said: “I am afraid I am giving you a great deal of trouble, but I really don’t know what I am to do. Would it be possible for you to reach the nearest village and get the people to send me help? That is the only thing I can think of.”

“I am afraid it is out of the question at present,” I answered. “We must wait until it becomes clearer. It would be madness to make the attempt while the fog is as thick as it is just now. We must possess our souls in patience, and make the best we can of a bad job. My only regret is that I cannot do more to ease your pain.”

“Oh, never mind that,” she said with assumed cheerfulness. “What cannot be cured, you know, must perforce be endured. As a matter of fact, I

really don't think it hurts me so much since you tied it up."

Acting up to my intention of making the best of affairs, I seated myself on another boulder some three or four paces distant from her, and prepared to beguile the time with conversation. I began by telling her who I was, which information, since she had never heard of me, could not have proved of much interest to her. In return, however, I elicited the fact that her name was Christina Farquharson, that she was by birth an Australian, that her father and mother were both dead, and that she had come home to England, six months before, to act as housekeeper to her grandfather, an old gentleman now nearly eighty years of age. What had induced the latter to take "The Crag" I was unable to discover; but that the place was distasteful to her admitted of no doubt. After the almost perpetual sunshine, the gloom and silence of that queer old house must have been depressing to a degree. Yet she did not complain. She had plainly a high sense of what she considered^d was her duty towards her aged relative, and it would have been plain to the meanest intelligence^t that she was resolved to carry that duty through at any cost to her own happiness.

Suddenly she uttered a little cry, which could

only have been one of pleasure, and my eyes followed the direction in which she pointed. Our luck had turned at last. *The sun was shining through the mist, and our enforced captivity was at an end.*

What was I to do now?

CHAPTER II

IN less than five minutes after Miss Farquharson had pointed out to me that the sun was piercing the mist which had so long held us its prisoners, the fog had completely disappeared, and it was possible for us to see the entire length and breadth of the valley. In order that you may understand something of the narrowness of our escape, it may be worth while putting on record the fact that when we were able to look about us, we found that we were not more than fifty yards from the ghyll which I had noticed prior to the fog's descent. Had I gone forward, as I had at one time thought of doing, it is quite certain that nothing could have prevented me from walking directly into it, in which case my doom would in all human probability have been hopelessly sealed, and this story would not have been written. It was by no means a cheerful thought, and to this day I experience a feeling of thankfulness whenever I think of what I was so mercifully spared. To divert my thoughts from the contemplation of what might have happened, I turned to my companion and carefully regarded

her. There could be no sort of doubt about the fact that she really was a decidedly pretty girl. Her eyes were of just that peculiar shade of the darkest grey, and looked at me with a trustfulness that spoke of their owner's sincerity and honesty of purpose. Her features were regular, and if by chance her complexion did happen to have been a little tanned by the sun—well, one cannot live the greater part of one's early life in the Australian bush for nothing. It is possible of course that I may be prejudiced, but to me there is something particularly fascinating about a sun-tanned complexion, more especially when it is accompanied by dark brown hair and grey eyes—even when those eyes do happen to be rendered sad by pain. I only know that my companion in the mist and my companion in the sunlight were two very separate and distinct personages, and each of them was equally charming. The question I had now to decide was that of getting her home; and if the truth must be confessed, I did not see how it was to be accomplished. As I have already pointed out, it was out of the question for me to think of carrying her so far. There was not a soul in sight, while to leave her was, for more reasons than one, not to be thought of. As a matter of fact, we stood and looked at each other in silent bewilderment. That she knew what was passing in my mind I

feel sure; I also think I knew what was passing through hers. One thing, however, was self-evident, and that was the fact that something must be done and done at once. Consider the problem from your own point of view, my indulgent reader. Imagine an extremely pretty girl, a young man, a sprained ankle, a pair of fairly strong arms, and a desolate stretch of moorland. What would you do? At length the absurdity of the whole business dawned upon us, and we both began to laugh.

"Really it is too ridiculous," she said, "and yet for the life of me I don't see what is to be done."

"That is exactly how I feel myself," I answered. "I wonder how far I could manage to carry you?"

"Not very far, I'm afraid," she replied, with a little laugh. "I weigh nearly nine stone six, and just look how rough the ground is. Oh! how silly it all is to be sure! And to think that but for my obstinacy in wanting to come out this morning, I might be safely at home now, looking after grandpapa, and, better still, able to put both feet to the ground."

"I trust your grandfather will not be nervous about you," I remarked, feeling that it behoved me to say something.

"I am dreadfully afraid he will," she answered, "for he never likes to let me out of his sight. There never was a kinder or dearer old man, and

"it hurts me more than I can say to think of the anxiety I am causing him. I am afraid I have been dreadfully selfish."

The prospect was far from being a cheerful one. It was evident, however, that something had to be done and at once. We had already been upwards of two hours in the fog, and for aught we knew to the contrary, it might at any moment descend upon us again. It was in vain that I searched the valley for assistance; not a soul was to be seen—hounds, huntsmen, and field had entirely disappeared. The only living objects to be seen were two or three crows lazily flapping their way in an easterly direction, and a tiny baby rabbit performing his toilet beside a tuft of bracken some twenty or thirty paces or so to our right.

"I think there is nothing for it but for me to do my best to carry you," I said at last. "We cannot remain where we are, and it is out of the question for you to attempt to walk. Do you mind if I lift you up?"

"Is it likely I should mind?" she answered, with almost a touch of scorn. Then she added more graciously, "I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you. What I should have done had Providence not sent you to my assistance, I cannot think. It does not look as if anyone ever came to this outlandish spot. You might as well be in the

great Australian desert. It certainly could not be more lonely."

Without any more palaver I stooped and picked her up in my arms. It was the first time in my life that I had done such a thing, and for that reason it is just possible I was rougher than I might have been had I had more experience. However, nervous or not, I set off down the hill with her, choosing my path as carefully as I knew how, and I have no doubt earning her scorn for my inability to carry the matter off with the *sang froid* of a man of the world. I have often thought since then of the picture I must have presented; the dull grey side of the fell behind me, the pretty girl in my arms, and my matter-of-fact countenance set stolidly in the direction of the opposite hill, on the far side of which her home lay.

By the time we had proceeded a hundred yards or so I was compelled to ask to be allowed to put her down for a few moments. Romance is all very well in its way, but nine stone of it takes a considerable amount of carrying, as you will find out if you ever try it. I shall never cease to admire the admirable self-confidence with which my fair companion carried off her side of the business. It might have been a most commonplace, every day affair, for all the importance she appeared to attach to it. Probably she looked upon me as a silly

hobbledehoy for not being able to make a jest of it as she did. I placed her on a boulder and stood before her; my face, I make no doubt, as red as a peony, and the perspiration trickling down my forehead and cheeks.

"You see I am not such a light weight after all," she observed, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. "You will be so stiff to-morrow that you will wish you had never seen me—or at any rate that you had never been obliged to carry me."

"I shall never do that," I replied, with a feeble attempt at gallantry. "My only wish is that I could do more for you than I am doing. I am afraid I am making but a poor job of it."

"You are not to say that," she answered authoritatively. "You have been more than kind and, as I said just now, I can never be sufficiently grateful to you. Unfortunately, however, that doesn't seem to mend matters, does it?"

I saw nothing for it but to admit that this was so. We were still three miles at least from her home, and how we were to overcome them I could not quite see. A pretty girl is always a pretty girl—but there can be no gainsaying the fact that pretty or not, nine stone six pounds is nine stone six pounds and has to be carried as such. Bewitching though she was, I began to think it would have been as well for me had she been two stone

lighter. I looked at her and found her eyes riveted on a patch of moss upon an adjacent boulder. The silence that followed was as embarrassing as it was protracted. I was the first to break it.

"I think, if you have no objection, it would be as well for us to be moving on," I said. "We have still some distance to go and I'm not at all sure that the fog will not come on again. If it does, it may last all night."

I cannot recall her reply now, but I believe it was merely a reiteration of her previous assertion that she was putting me to too much trouble. Whatever it was, however, I paid no attention to it, but stooping, took her in my arms and started upon the march once more. Though many years have passed since all this happened, I can feel the absurdity of the situation as acutely as I did then. And yet, goodness knows, it seemed far removed from the realms of absurdity at the time. The better to support herself she placed one arm round my neck, her head rested on my right shoulder, and the perfume of her hair filled my nostrils like some intoxicating liquor. Once I ventured to look down at her, and the smile I saw upon her face set me blushing like the veriest lovesick schoolboy. Needless to say, between her weight and the

difficulty of choosing the track, conversation was out of the question—so that I had at least one thing to be thankful for. I don't pretend for a moment that I am more sensitive than my fellows, but I must admit I am peculiarly susceptible to ridicule, and here I was confronted with the ridiculous in an extraordinary degree.

For upwards of twenty minutes I staggered on and on, resolved not to give in until I was absolutely obliged to do so. At last, however, I could go no further and once more I was compelled to put her down. At this rate it did not look as if I should ever get her home. The same thought must have been in her mind, for I saw her eyes roam wistfully along the valley as if she were anxious to convince herself that we had at least made some progress.

"I wonder whether, if you gave me your arm, I could manage to walk a portion of the way?" she said at last, looking up at me with an expression I did not quite understand upon her face. "My ankle is not nearly as painful as it was. At any rate I can make the attempt."

"No, no," I answered, with an attempt at some sort of authority. "You must not do anything of the kind. You would have to give in before you had gone a dozen yards. We have got on

famously so far, and I have no doubt that I shall get you home in time. I know it is very uncomfortable for you, but if you can put up with it for a little longer it will be all right in the end."

"You are more than good," she replied, with a resignation that I could see was only feigned. "I feel such a wretch to be putting you to so much trouble. To the day of my death I shall regret coming out with the hounds this morning."

"In other words you mean that you will regret having given me the opportunity of helping you," I said, with a boldness that surprised even myself.

She turned her beautiful eyes full upon me. I may of course be wrong, but I could not help fancying that there was a mischievous sparkle in them.

"I'm afraid if you had known what was in store for you," she said, "you would not have been so anxious to play the part of the gallant knight. Answer me candidly—do you think you would?"

"I am quite sure of it," was my reply, and as I said it I noticed that a rosy flush suffused her face. Some men would have known how to turn this to account, but my experience of the sex was too limited to enable me to do so. I was, therefore, compelled to hold my tongue. At the same time I was conscious of a feeling that she must despise me for my rusticity. The power of a pretty girl

under such circumstances as I am describing is infinitely greater than most folk would imagine, and I was being treated to a taste of it.

Once more, and this time without an attempt at apology, I took her in my arms and continued my weary march. For some indescribable reason I was angry with myself and at the same time still more annoyed with her. There was only one thing for which I felt in any way grateful, and that was the fact that there was no third person present to witness my discomfiture. Such were my feelings indeed that, had there been, I verily believe I should have dropped her there and then and have taken to my heels and run for my life.

Over the remainder of that terrible journey I must draw a kindly curtain. Let it suffice that in due course I reached the gate of "The Crag" and made my way up the moss covered drive to the house. As I have already said—the place had not been tenanted for some years, and in consequence everything had been allowed to go to rack and ruin. Old Mr. Farquharson had certainly done something in the way of paintwork on the outside of the house, but even that did not serve to make it any more cheerful. Of all the dreary residences I know I think, nay I am sure, that it was by many degrees the most forlorn. Behind the house the hill rose almost precipitous, rock clad, grey and

desolate. Only a few stunted trees gave any sort of relief to the garden, and their general appearance seemed to hint that they felt they ought not to be there. The house itself was built of grey stone—much stained with age. All that could be said of it was that it was of the ugliest type of the Georgian era and was in perfect keeping with its surroundings.

Putting forth a final effort I carried my fair burden up the drive and deposited her on the front door steps while I rang the bell. The very clangour of that most inharmonious instrument spoke for the misery of the place, for even it was out of repair, and when I did succeed in making it respond to my repeated tuggings it was a cracked tintinnabulation that echoed down the corridors and died away in some subterraneous regions of the house. How this merry, bright faced girl managed to support existence in such a place passed my comprehension. A week of it would I believe have been sufficient to have driven me into a lunatic asylum. My first attempt not having proved successful, I pulled the bell again. Once more it resounded through the house and this time with better effect, for the noise of shuffling footsteps on the stone flagging was to be heard from within.

“Poor old Thomas is as deaf as a post,”

explained Miss Farquharson. "You are lucky to have got him to answer the bell so quickly. As a rule it takes him about five minutes to understand what is wanted and another five to get from the kitchen to the front door. He scarcely does any work—yet nothing will induce my grandfather to get rid of him."

As she finished speaking the door was opened some two or three inches and an old man's face, wrinkled like a sun-dried apple and set in a frame of grey whiskers, looked out upon us. It was evident that he did not see his young mistress seated upon the step. It was also plain that he did not regard me with any too much favour. Doubtless he was wondering what had brought me to the house, and whether I had any designs on the silver.

"Who are ye, and what do ye want?" was his brusque enquiry. "If ye want the master, he can't see ye!"

He said this with such a truculent air that it was as much as I could do to prevent myself from pulling him out and kicking him.

"I do not want to see your master," I replied. "I have brought Miss Farquharson home. She met with an accident this morning on the fell, and I was fortunate enough to be able to render her assistance."

From the expression on his face I could plainly tell that he had not understood a word of what I had said to him. But it was evident that he had become aware of his young mistress' presence on the steps.

"So ye've come back," he remarked rudely. "And a nice bother ye've given us all. Ye're gran'father's been asking for ye these two hours or more. It's a nice tear he's been in about ye."

His manner was more than I could put up with, and I told him that it was not right of him to speak to a lady in such a fashion. Some part of my remonstrance must have penetrated his sluggish brain, for he glared at me as if he was amazed at my impudence in daring to address him in such a fashion.

"Please do not be angry with him, Mr. Dennison," said Miss Farquharson. "He does not really mean to be rude. It is only his manner. He has been so long with my grandfather that he has been spoilt. If you would not mind giving me the assistance of your arm once more I will try to get into the house."

I did as she asked me and managed to help her into the hall and to a chair, into which she sank with a groan of relief. As for me, I was quite worn out with my exertions. I had always had reason to consider myself a fairly strong man, but

to be called upon to carry a young lady of nine stone such a long distance without feeling any fatigue certainly proved to be more than I could manage. As she dropped into her chair a door at the further end of the gloomy old hall opened and a very aged man with silvery hair, that fell in curls upon his shoulders, came out and stood for a moment regarding us in silent astonishment. Then, leaning on a stick, he came hobbling towards us. His face was clean shaven, refined, and of the most extraordinary pallor—which latter was accentuated by the whiteness of his hair and his strange old-fashioned black silk stock and well-worn velvet coat. His age could not have fallen far short of eighty, and, judging by appearances, it might have been more, so bent and feeble was he. Without a doubt this was Mr. Farquharson—my fair companion's grandfather. Possibly the fact that she did not rise from the chair in which I had placed her, taken in conjunction with the look of pain upon her face, warned him that something was wrong.

Here I thought that it was time for me to intervene, and I accordingly did so.

“Miss Farquharson has had the ill luck to sprain her ankle somewhat severely,” I observed. “It was my good fortune to discover her in the mist and to assist her home. In these thick fogs the

falls are dangerous places—even for those who have a lifelong acquaintance with them.”

“I cannot be sufficiently grateful to Mr. Dennison for his kindness to me,” went on the girl. “What I should have done otherwise, I dare not think.”

“Sir, I am obliged to you for the service you have rendered both me and her,” chimed in the old man. “It was against my express wishes that she went out this morning, and I only trust that the result may act as a deterrent to her to act against my desires in the future. You are doubtless acquainted with the mountainous district hereabouts, but she knows absolutely nothing of the dangers that any moment may produce. I am the more surprised, therefore, that she should have acted with so small an amount of discrimination.”

“But, my dear sir,” I continued, “if you will pardon my saying so, I think we have every reason to be thankful that matters are no worse than they are. I think it only right to tell you that had she proceeded another fifty or sixty yards she would most certainly have walked over the edge of a deep ravine, the consequences of which I must leave to your imagination.”

“God be thanked for His mercy,” he said, piously. “Your escape has indeed been a narrow one. Take warning by it. Now the sooner you

get to your own room and to bed, the sooner your foot can be attended to." Turning to the manservant, he continued, "Call Mrs. Parsons to Miss Christina's assistance. With her help, I presume, it will be possible for you to reach your own apartment."

Supporting herself by the arm of the chair in which she had been sitting, the girl struggled to her feet, only to sink back again immediately with a little cry of pain.

"I am afraid you will not be able to mount the stairs," I said. Indeed, one had only to look at the agony depicted on her face to be sure that what the old man had proposed was out of the question. At that moment Mrs. Parsons, a buxom, motherly individual—who was evidently the cook—made her appearance from the back regions of the house. She took in the situation at a glance, and hastened to her young mistress' side.

"Poor dear! poor dear!" she cried, as she knelt down to remove the girl's left shoe. "We'll have to carry ye up to ye're bed, I can see, for ye could no more set foot to ground than ye could fly. We must try to carry ye between us."

"If you will allow me I think I can be of service in that respect," I observed. "I have already carried her some miles to-day."

Her grandfather raising no objection to my

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proposal, I took her up in my arms and passed along the hall towards the broad oak staircase, closely followed by Mrs. Parsons, who continually adjured her to keep up a stout heart as she'd soon be made comfortable. In this fashion we reached the landing above. Scarcely had we done so, however, when I felt her head droop limply on my shoulder and, with a little sigh, she fainted away in my arms.

"Don't stop, sir, don't stop," cried the elder woman. "That is her room on the right. As soon as you have laid her on the bed, I'll get some brandy from the dining-room, and it won't be a minute before she'll be round again."

I carried out her instructions and, on reaching the plainly furnished little room in question, I laid her gently down. Then, feeling that I could be of no further assistance, I followed the old woman downstairs once more. The master of the house was awaiting my coming in the hall with the butler by his side. The latter, to my astonishment, made as if he would offer some objection to dispensing the brandy, but Mrs. Parsons was not to be denied, and he was at length compelled to furnish her with what she required. Meanwhile the old gentleman stood looking on as if he were too overcome by emotion to recognise the importance of the situation.

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When the woman had returned to the room upstairs, I prepared to make myself scarce. The old gentleman made no effort to detain me, nor was it until I had shaken hands with him and expressed a hope that it would not be long before his granddaughter would be able to get about once more, that it seemed to strike him that he had been a laggard in hospitality. It was nearly three o'clock by this time and I had eaten nothing since breakfast. Added to this, I had a long six-mile walk before me before I could reach home. Meagre as his offer was, consisting as it did of a glass of brown sherry and two or three biscuits, I availed myself of it with alacrity and, having disposed of it, donned my cap and set off on my wearisome tramp. I had almost reached the gate when I stopped to light my pipe in the shelter of a bush. I had just succeeded in inducing it to draw and had thrown the match away when, peeping through the leaves, I saw emerging from an overgrown shrubbery path on the other side of the drive, the figures of two men, one of whom, I should say, was nearly seventy years of age, his companion probably being some forty years his junior. Both were dressed entirely in black. The elder presented a most strange, grotesque, and I should not be far removed from the truth if I were to add, uncanny appearance. He was very tall, very thin,

and possessed an overgrown grey beard. His complexion was almost negro-like in its swarthiness—the curious effect of which was heightened by his broad nostrils and dark eyes. His companion was shorter by some inches; he, like the other, seemed to show unmistakable signs of having negro blood in his veins. His hair was close and curly, and he boasted a small, carefully cultivated moustache, beneath which his teeth gleamed ivory white every time he opened his lips. His expression was by no means a pleasant one, and derived an additional disfavour from the fact that his left eye possessed an unmistakable cast. A more objectionable couple I never remember to have met before, and I could not refrain from wondering what their business might be on Mr. Farquharson's premises. The young lady had said nothing to me concerning them, and I also recalled the fact that I had noticed, while I partook of my refreshment, that the dining-room table had been laid for two people only—presumably Miss Christina and her grandfather. If I were correct in my guess it would look as if these two extraordinary individuals were not staying in the house, and yet again the question—What reason had they for wandering about the grounds in this familiar fashion? However, it was no business of mine, so that there was nothing for it but for me, as soon

as they had passed, to pocket my curiosity and continue my walk without further delay. To say, however, that I did not think any more of them would not be the truth. For some queer reason or another the memory of their dusky faces haunted me continually and, when I imagined them in the company of that beautiful and refined girl, a feeling of indescribable loathing took possession of me.

The short winter's afternoon had drawn to a close before I reached home and the lights of the house greeted me with a cheeriness that I was in just the humour to appreciate. I found my dear old mother in her drawing-room, seated beside her afternoon tea table before the fire and evidently awaiting my coming.

"My dear boy," she said, "how late you are; and you look tired out."

"I certainly am tired," I replied, and as I ate my tea I furnished her with an account of my day's adventures.

"So that dismal old house is let at last?" she said, when I had finished. "It is a curious home for a young girl, particularly with only an old man to keep her company. Did I understand you to say that she was pretty?"

"I should call her distinctly so," I answered. "I wonder what brought them to Westmoreland—and to 'The Crag,' of all places in the county."

"I have never heard the name of Farquharson in these parts before," said the old lady reflectively. "One thing, however, is quite certain. If he wants to be quiet, he could not have chosen a better place."

The subject then dropped, and presently I went off to my room to change my clothes for the evening. Still I found myself unable to rid my mind of the thought of those two men whom I had seen in the shrubbery at "The Crag" that afternoon. As a rule, I am not easily affected by such trivial matters, but their two personalities had certainly produced an extraordinary effect upon me. I seemed to see them looking at me all through the evening and, when I retired to rest at an early hour, it was to dream of them repeatedly throughout the night. Yet, do what I would, I could not account for it. I simply place the fact on record having regard to the events I shall be called upon to record later on in my story.

CHAPTER III

THE next day, a Thursday, if I remember aright, I found it necessary to go to Kendal on business of considerable importance, and in consequence I did not reach home until a late hour. I had had a long and tiring day, and I am very much afraid that I was not in the best of tempers when I sat down to the supper which had been so carefully kept hot for me. My equanimity was not improved by the discovery that old Hannah, our parlourmaid, who had been in my mother's service from the time that she married my father, had been hard at work all day upsetting the entire household, had reduced my mother to tears, and sent her to bed with a sick headache, had driven the cook nearly into hysterics, and was now prepared to furnish me with a sample of her ill humour.

"There's been a man here twice to see you this day," she began, as she slapped a dish down

before me in a manner which seemed to say, "you take it or leave it, just as you please." "I told him you was out and would not be home till late. 'Then I'll look back again during the afternoon,' says my fine gentleman, an' sure enough, back he comes just as I was getting the mistress her tea an' thinking about a cup for myself. 'Has he come back yet?' he asks, lookin' at me sideways as impudent as a young cock sparrow. 'No, he's not in,' says I, 'and I don't know when he will be. For what I can tell he may not see his bed this blessed night. It's not my business to be pryin' into his concerns, so I'll thank you to let me shut the door and mind my own business.' With that I made as if I would put the door to on him—when, you may believe me or not, what does my fine gentleman do but clap his foot against it. 'I'll call the police,' I cried, well knowin', sinful creatures that we all are, that old Jacob was lyin' abed with the rheumatiz and that there's ne'er another constable this side of Ambleside. • 'Don't be a fool, woman,' said he, and you could have knocked me down with a feather as I listened to him. 'I want to see your master on most important business, and as soon as possible. My time is of value to me, if yours is not to you. Now, be reasonable and tell me at what time you think I can see him. When I do you shall have five

shillin's for your trouble.' So sayin', he happened to move his foot and before he could put it back again I had slammed the door in his ugly face. I could hear him swearin' to himself on the other side of it like a heathen—then he went away grumblin' down the drive. It's my belief he would have cut my throat if he could ha' got at me."

"You're an old fool, Hannah," I cried, glaring angrily at her, "and I tell you so to your face. For all you know to the contrary this gentleman might be an influential client, whom, by your idiocy, you have in all probability driven away to seek advice elsewhere."

• I can even now see the look of fury upon her face as she realised what I was saying to her. For a moment I thought she was about to have a fit. It was the first time in my life I had dared to beard her in such a fashion and, angry as I was, I don't mind admitting that I trembled at my own audacity.

"So I'm an old fool, am I, Master Graham?" she cried. "An old idiot, too, if I'm to believe your own words. Well, may God ha' mercy upon you for a wicked lad, seein' what I've done for you and yours these many years. And all for the sake of a heathen black nigger who tried to bribe me with five shillin's to go against my duty. Take shame of yourself, Master Graham, I say—take

shame of yourself. May you never be wrongfully accused yourself is my only hope and prayer. If so be you are, maybe you'll remember this day."

At this point there was a distant tremor in her voice and my fears increased a hundredfold, for something told me that she was about to revenge herself on me with that most womanly of all retaliations, a flood of tears. However, I hardened my heart with another whisky and soda, and determined not to let her go until I had thrashed the whole matter out. Termagant though she could be, I knew that in her heart of hearts there existed a real affection for my mother and myself, and I resolved to do my utmost to trade upon this affection now. To allow her to suppose that I was in any way penitent would have been to ruin everything. I therefore adopted another course.

"Now, look here, Hannah," I said, firmly, "you must plainly understand, once for all, that when people come to consult me on business I *must* see them. I cannot allow possible clients to slip through my fingers as you would seem to wish me to do. No doubt you thought you were acting for the best when you sent this gentleman away, but I am equally certain that you will not do so again. Try to furnish me with a description of him if you can. It is just possible I may be able to locate him. Have you ever seen him before?"

"No, an' never want to again," was the still bellicose reply. "Thankin' you all the same, Master Graham, but I don't want to have no dealin's with heathen niggers at my time of life."

This was the second time she had made use of the term "heathen nigger," and it set me thinking. Was it possible that the caller could be one of the two mysterious individuals I had seen in the garden of "The Crag" on the previous evening?

"Was the man young or old?" I asked.

"Maybe about the same age as yourself," she answered—and added spitefully, "I couldn't abear the look of him. I turned that queer at the sight of him that I didn't feel myself again for a good hour or more."

"What was it about him that was so repugnant to you?" I asked.

"I don't know what you mean by your long words," she answered, "but this I do know, and that is, I can't bear to look upon a black man's face, nor never could."

"Do you mean that this visitor was a coloured man?" I asked. She paused for a moment as if she were anxious not to commit herself too emphatically.

"I don't say as how I can say truthfully that he was exactly a nigger," she said at last. "But for all that he wasn't white. He was a sort of mix-up

between the two—like a copper kettle that's been allowed to get sooty."

The simile did not strike me as being particularly apt, but I let it pass for what it was worth. Though I felt practically certain in my own mind that I recognised my man, I was anxious to set the matter at rest once and for all. I therefore prepared to continue my cross-examination of my witness, who was becoming less voluble as she saw my curiosity increase.

"Did you happen to notice anything peculiar about his eyes?" I enquired. She stared at me with surprise.

"Only that one of them squinted so that it looked as if he was tryin' for to see round to the back of his head. Nasty eyes they were too, yellowy and bloodshot, for all the world just as if he had the yaller jarndice."

Hearing this I had no sort of doubt that the man who had called was none other than the younger of the two curious individuals, my chance meeting with whom had caused me so much concern on the previous day.

"You don't mean to say as how you know him, Master Graham, do you?" asked our old handmaid, anxiously, as if she feared that any contact I might have had with him would ostracise me from my fellow beings for ever and a day. "I

can't believe you would have anything to do with the likes of him."

"If he is the man I think he is, I have only seen him once in my life—and then for less than a minute," I answered. "However, if he should chance to call to-morrow morning, be sure that you let me know," and then, more to myself than to her, I added, "I am curious to know what his business with me can be."

She heaved a heavy sigh, possibly for my folly in consenting to accord an interview to such an abominable person, and then, having ascertained that I required nothing further, left the room in a better temper than when she had entered it.

When she had taken her departure, I mixed myself a glass of hot grog and sat myself down before the fire with it and my favourite pipe, to think over the situation. What on earth could the fellow want with me? There were several other lawyers in the district, and it struck me as being more than strange that he should have come to my private residence and not to my office. Then I began to see matters in another light. After all, why should he want to consult me on legal matters at all. Might he not be the bearer of a note of thanks from old Mr. Farquharson for the service I had rendered his grand-daughter? But when I came to consider it, that hypothesis did not seem to

fit in, for the old gentleman could just as easily have posted his letter as have sent a messenger with it. By the time my grog and my pipe were both finished I had arrived at the conclusion that it was no use my worrying myself about it. Time would unravel the mystery, if mystery there were.

Next morning I was somewhat late for breakfast. Let it be my record of shame that ten o'clock had struck before I took my place at the table. My mother did not feel well enough to put in an appearance, so I was compelled to sit down to my meal alone. The only thing certain about it all was the validity of my appetite. I had poured out my second cup of coffee and was contemplating the ordering of a further supply of ham and eggs when I heard the front door bell ring and a few moments later old Hannah entered the room, with a card upon a salver which, by the way, she held as if she were afraid it would bite her.

"Who is it?" I asked, before I picked it up.

"The——" she paused, and then said, defiantly and with an abruptness that was almost staggering—"it's the nigger man who called yesterday."

I took the card from the salver and examined it. Printed on it were the three words—"Monsieur Hippolyte D'Iberville."

"The name suggests French extraction," I said

to myself, and then aloud, "Where have you shown him?"

"He's in the hall," was Hannah's uncompromising reply. "You don't think, Master Graham, I was a-going to show him into your study without orders. Client or no client, as you call them, I wouldn't trust him as far as I could see my hand before my face!"

I quelled her with a glance, and bade her show him into the room in question and prepared myself to follow after a decent interval. When I did it became evident that I had not been mistaken in my surmise. Seated in a chair beside the fire was the man I had expected to see—that is to say, the younger of the two dusky individuals whom I had discovered at "The Crag." The morning was bitterly cold, even for our north country, and it was evident that the miserable fellow before me felt it keenly, warmly wrapped up though he was. A more pitiable picture than he presented at that moment you would be unable to imagine. His teeth chattered in his head, while his hands, which were spread out to the flames, trembled as if with the palsy. On seeing me he rose, and I noticed that a look of surprise appeared upon his face.

"Monsieur Hippolyte D'Iberville, I believe," I

said, glancing at the card I held in my hand as I spoke.

"*Oui*, Monsieur; and you are Monsieur Dennison, the well known lawyer, without a doubt," he answered in excellent English, but with an unmistakable foreign accent.

I bowed as if in appreciation of the compliment he paid me, and then signed him back to his chair by the fire, at which I noticed he had more than once glanced longingly. Repulsive as his appearance was, I could not help feeling sorry for the poor wretch. Even in these enlightened days it is possible to feel pity for a dying animal.

"May I ask in what way I can be of service to you?" I began, when I had seated myself opposite him.

"I have come to you for advice," he answered. "Not so much on my own account as on that of others. I find myself in a curiously unfortunate position."

"Perhaps it would be as well for you to tell me what that position is."

For a moment he squinted horribly—so much indeed that I began to think his left eye would never return to its normal position. I could see that he was endeavouring to make up his mind as to what course of action he should pursue.

"I might begin by informing you that the reason

which brings me to you is a little out of the common," he said, regarding the fire steadfastly as he spoke, probably in the hope of deriving inspiration from it. "To be quite candid with you, it is so far out of the ordinary that, after mature consideration we, that is to say, Monsieur my father and I, came to the conclusion that we should only be justified in placing it in the hands of one who is known to be the cleverest representative of the legal profession in this district."

Said I to myself, "If you are going to be fulsome, my man, I shall dislike you even more thoroughly than I do at present, and that will be no small matter." Aloud I gave him to understand that I had no claim to any such eminence as he credited me with. Once more I pressed him to tell me what the business was concerning which he desired to consult me, and again there was the same curious hesitancy. I could not be blamed if I experienced the feeling that he had come with the intention of asking me to do something of which he felt sure I should not approve.

"As I said to you just now," he continued, as if he had forgotten that he had mentioned the fact before, "I have come to you for advice on a matter of the most vital importance."

As he said this, his fingers played nervously with the buttons of his overcoat. He took his handker-

chief from his pocket. That the man was nervous was self-apparent, but what it was that caused it I was not, of course, in a position to say. I only know that every moment that I remained in his company I found his presence becoming more and more repulsive to me.

"I am quite ready to place my professional knowledge at your service," I observed, but without any sort of enthusiasm, after the long and awkward pause which followed his last speech. "Would it not be better if you were to tell me your business at once, so that we may know how we stand. At present, I am quite in the dark."

"Well, the fact of the matter is, I find myself placed in a strangely unfortunate position."

He paused as if he expected me to ask what that unfortunate position might be. When I merely nodded my head I could see that he was disappointed.

"I trust I am not inconveniencing you by calling at this early hour?" he said, after he had again peered into the fire.

I shook my head, and it appeared to give him confidence.

"Perhaps you will permit me to tell you something of my life's history. As it has a considerable bearing on the case concerning which I am

consulting you, it will doubtless prove of assistance to you in arriving at your decision."

Now, when a man expresses a desire to tell me his "life's history," my experience has taught me to make a point of distrusting him on principle. No one, that is to say, not one in possession of his proper senses, much less a stranger, would furnish one with information connected with his past life, unless he felt that he had good and sufficient reason for so doing. In this case I had yet to learn what those reasons were.

"I was born in New Orleans," my extraordinary client went on, and as he said it, I noticed that he licked his dry lips. "So far as I am concerned, New Orleans is the only romantic spot left in our glorious heritage. I had all the advantages of a generous education. Money was of no object. I had but to express a wish and, if possible, it was gratified."

I consulted my watch. It began to look as if this interview would never come to an end. What was more extraordinary still, I realised that my client's nervousness, upon which I have already commented, was increasing, if one may so express it, by leaps and bounds. Try how I would I could not account for his curious behaviour. That the fellow was frightened was beyond question, yet for

the life of me I could discover no reason for it. His smallest actions were significant. He lifted up a paper weight from the table beside him as if to examine it, and replaced it without doing so. He wore a gold signet ring upon the little finger of his left hand, and if he slipped it off once in the first five minutes that he sat before me, he must have done so a dozen times. Watching him as I did, I saw large beads of perspiration break out upon his forehead, and, though I do not pretend to be a more than average judge of human nature, these tiny drops told their own tale. Yet at the back of it all loomed the momentous question: what was the reason of it all?

"Mr. Dennison, you have the reputation of being a kindly hearted man," he said, pushing back his red silk handkerchief as he spoke. "Your fame has most certainly been noised abroad."

This heavy-handed flattery was certainly more than I could put up with.

"Don't you think it would be as well," I answered, "to leave my fame out of the question? To be blunt with you, I am not susceptible to compliments. To me they are objectionable, even when sincere. Let us confine ourselves to the matter in hand."

He shot another hasty glance at me. It was

evident to me that he knew he had made a mistake, and it was also apparent that he did not see how he was going to retrieve it. Strange to relate, I was also beginning to feel unaccountably nervous—though why I should have been so I could not tell you if my life depended on it. I have often looked back upon that strange interview, and each time with more and more wonderment at my moderation. I had detested the man most cordially from the moment that I first saw him, and yet I could not have told you why. There was something physically repulsive about him, which produced in me a feeling not unlike that which most people experience for a snake, a rat, or a toad. The very crispness of his hair, the colour of his skin, to say nothing of the cast in his eye, nauseated me beyond expression. To such a pitch did my antagonism at length arrive, that I felt that either he or I must vacate the room. I could not breathe the same air with him. Pulling myself together with an effort I again approached him finally on the subject of his business. I warned him that my time was valuable, and that it was necessary I should be getting to my office, where I had four decidedly important appointments awaiting me.

“Perhaps it would be as well if you were to write to me,” I said, when my patience had reached

its limits. "You might find it easier to put your ideas on paper."

"Not at all—not at all," was his immediate and emphatic reply. "I must discuss the matter with you face to face, and at once. Time is as essential to me as it is to you. I wonder if you would mind if I trespassed upon your hospitality to the extent of a glass of brandy. I have been suffering from a recurrence of a bad attack of malarial fever, which very nearly terminated my existence a year ago."

I had only to look at the man's face to see that he was lying. But the reason for it all was still as obscure as ever. I rose from my chair, however, and went to the cabinet at the further end of the room, where I poured him out a stiff glass of spirit. He tossed it off as if it were so much water, and in a few seconds was apparently much the better for it.

"Mr. Dennison," he said, after a short pause, during which I stared out of the window at the holly trees on the lawn, "I can only again ask you to believe me when I say that the matter which has brought me to you is of no ordinary importance. The interests involved are so far-reaching that I can scarcely expect you to appreciate them at their proper value until I have fully explained them to you."

"I shall be better able to judge of that when I

hear what they are," I replied, but still without any sign of enthusiasm.

"As I have already told you," he continued, "I was born in New Orleans, of which city my father is a well known citizen. He has extensive business connections throughout the entire South American continent, and I am, or was, for he has now retired, his sole partner and heir. Among the firms with which he traded was one which was destined to have peculiar attractions for me. The head of the business had originally been associated with us in a certain momentous venture. It was confidently ~~expected~~ that it would result in substantial fortunes for us all. In proof of this I might say that my own portion was to be not only half a million dollars, but the hand of the senior partner's granddaughter in marriage."

In a second my apathy vanished. As a matter of fact, I was at last beginning to understand something of what it all meant. The lady in question was without doubt Miss Farquharson, while the head of the business firm of which my client had spoken could scarcely fail to be anyone but the old gentleman who had taken "The Crag."

"I am afraid I don't see yet what you want of me," I remarked.

"You will in a moment," he replied, quickly.

"As I have said, it was one of the clauses of our contract that, should the venture prove successful, I should be at liberty to make the young lady my wife. Bear in mind always that this was distinctly agreed. As a matter of fact, everything was so far arranged that even the date of the wedding day was settled. Scarcely had this been done, however, when both the old gentleman and his granddaughter disappeared, taking with them the fortune which should have been divided between the grandfather, my father, and myself. As you may suppose, I was inconsolable—the whole world was a blank to me. I became seriously ill. My life trembled in the balance. I tried, however, to appear cheerful for my father's sake."

His prolixity was more than I could put up with. It began to look as if I should never get to my office. If I lost my temper, I trust I may be excused. It surely cannot be said that I had had no provocation.

"You must excuse me, sir," I said, "if I remind you that I am still quite unable to understand what it is that has brought you to me. You have doubtless since married the lady in question?"

"Had I only been vouchsafed the opportunity," he answered, "I would willingly have done so. In spite of all their protestations, however, it came to nothing. I had invested money in the grand-

father's business, and I would have done all that mortal man could do to have proved myself a worthy husband. The result you know. I should not like to be thought unscrupulous; nevertheless, I must confess that I feel an ardent desire to be even with them for the way in which they have treated me, and I don't think it can be said that I have not good cause."

"If what you tell me is correct," I said—for, between ourselves, I did not believe a word of it—"you certainly have been harshly treated. It strikes me that if they have behaved to you as you describe, you are well rid of the young lady in question."

"But I love her," he cried. "She is all the world to me. To put it vulgarly, I have speculated in the estate for the young lady's sake and I have lost everything—not only my intended wife, but my money and my happiness. Now what I want you to do for me, Mr. Dennison, is to advise me as to what steps I should take to recover, if not the lady, at least my share of the fortune."

"In other words, I take it, the recovery of your money is the vital point," I replied, contemptuously.

"No, sir," he observed. "I am not so mean as that. The money is not the vital point. It is the lady of whom I am thinking. To make her my

wife, I would willingly sacrifice everything. My affection for her is not a question of pounds, shillings and pence. It is a matter of honest and sincere attachment, and, if I lose her, I can assure you I shall never be the same man again. I ask you to believe that ! ”

At this juncture he was overtaken by such a fit of coughing, that for a few moments I began to fear lest he might break a blood vessel. By a supreme effort, however, he managed to pull himself together, and by the time I might have counted a hundred he was to all intents and purposes himself once more.

“ But I must marry the lady,” he continued, when he could once more speak. “ She must become my wife. It is imperative. I tell you at once, I cannot live without her.”

“ That may be so,” I replied. “ But what if she does not wish to marry you? How do you propose to act in that case? ”

“ It is on that point I desire to consult you,” he answered. “ You surely do not suppose I should have wasted my time in coming to see you unless I stood in need of expert assistance. There must surely be some way in which she can be compelled to do what is fair and just by me.”

“ You must know as well as I do, that you cannot force her to accept you.”

"I would do anything rather than lose her," he said. "My love for her is such that I would stick at nothing."

"In that case, all I can say is, you had better get someone else to advise you," I replied. "I can have nothing to do with the matter. My practice does not lie in that direction."

The look he gave me on hearing this I shall never forget. It was like the glare of a wolf when he finds himself caught in a trap.

"Very good," he said, rising to his feet as he spoke, and almost hissing the words at me. "I am to understand, then, that you refuse to help me?"

"If you wish to take it that way—yes," I replied. "I cannot be a party to such a disgraceful proceeding. If Miss Farquharson, who, I take it, is the young lady in question, does not wish to——" Here I came to a sudden stop. I had committed a grievous blunder, and it was self-evident that I should be called upon to pay for it.

"What do you know of Miss Farquharson?" he cried, furiously, looking at me as he spoke as if he would like to kill me. "How do you know that my business had anything to do with her?"

By this time I had recovered my presence of mind, and was endeavouring to discover how I could cope with the situation. I realised that it

was necessary to put him off the scent, but it was more difficult to see quite how to do it. I therefore resolved to play a game of bluff.

"I must ask you not to adopt that tone with me," I said, stiffly. "Did I not understand you to say that the young lady was a Miss Farquharson?"

It immediately became evident that he distrusted his memory, for he hummed and hawed as if he were uncertain what answer to make to my last speech.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Dennison," he said, "but I cannot help thinking you are taking advantage of my inexperience of English customs."

"Be good enough to say in what way you think I am doing so," I replied. "As I understand it, you have merely called to consult me on a matter of business. You will scarcely deny me the right to refuse a client. Had you been more explicit at the beginning it is possible we might have parted on more friendly terms. As it is, however, I can only say that I am not prepared to do anything to further your ends."

"In other words, you refuse to help me?"

"If you want to put it bluntly, I can only answer—yes!"

"You know that I have been wronged—that I have suffered unmerited misfortune?"

"I have only your word for it."

"Is my word not enough?"

"Under other circumstances, it is possible it might be."

"I fail to understand your meaning. You evidently desire to insult me."

"Pardon me—no! I merely decline to undertake the business you offer me. I believe I am within my rights."

"In that case, I will wish you good morning."

"Good morning," I answered, and rang the bell for the front door.

"You will regret this!"

"It is possible," I replied, with sarcastic courtesy, "but, I venture to think, scarcely probable." Then, with a sudden inspiration for which I cannot now account, I added, "You will offer no objection, I am sure, to my informing Miss Farquharson of your call upon me?"

A few moments later he had fled the house, and old Hannah and I were exchanging glances on the front door steps.

"I wonder, Master Graham, that ye take up with such folks as yon," said she.

"I wonder at it myself," I answered, and went in to put on my boots. As I did so, I could not help thinking of the famous Lord of Sheppey, Sir

Robert de Shurland, who, in all cases of emergency called for his boots and then proceeded to business. In spite of my desire not to think of it, I could not help speculating as to what the end of this curious business would be.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER the departure of Monsieur Hippolyte D'Iberville, I made my way to my office, where I found sufficient business to keep me busily employed for the greater part of the day. As a matter of fact, the clock had struck five before I reached home once more. It was a bitterly cold night, and I had the best of reasons for feeling certain that the country would be frostbound in the morning. It was with the greatest satisfaction, therefore, that I closed the front door behind me and went in search of my dear old mother. As usual, I found her seated beside her tea table, her spectacles perched on the end of her nose, and her cap at an angle of I don't know how many degrees.

"Surely you are later than usual, my dear boy," she said, as I bent down to kiss her. "I have been watching the clock for nearly three-quarters of an hour, and listening for your step upon the gravel."

"I've had a good deal to do to-day," I replied.
"I am sorry if I have kept you waiting."

"My dear lad," she answered, patting my hand as she spoke in her usual affectionate manner, "you know that has nothing to do with it. The fact of the matter is, I have been anxiously awaiting your return for the reason that a letter has been left for you marked, *Important*, and the messenger has returned twice for an answer."

As you may suppose, my thoughts immediately reverted to my extraordinary visitor of the morning.

"I suppose he was not a dark man by any chance?" I asked.

"A dark man, dear?" she replied with amazement plainly written on her face. "What on earth should make you ask such a question? The letter was brought by an old man, who was very deaf and evidently very tired. At first he did not seem inclined to trust it to me, but, on my assuring him that you should have it immediately you returned, he consented to leave it in my charge. Here it is!"

Thereupon she produced from a small cabinet beside her an envelope addressed to me and carefully sealed. The writing was unknown to me, but one glance at it showed me that it was of a distinctly feminine character. I tore open the

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envelope and withdrew the contents. This is what I read :—

THE CRAG,

Friday afternoon.

DEAR MR. DENNISON,

I am desired by my grandfather to appeal to your kindness in a quite extraordinary manner. How I am to broach the matter to you I scarcely know, but I feel that it must be arranged, and all I can do is to leave it to your generosity to acquit me of any attempt to unduly worry you. Would it be possible for you to come and see my grandfather to-night? He has business of the greatest importance concerning which he desires to consult you, and of which I really know nothing. The extraordinary part of the matter is that he would prefer you, if you can see your way to doing so, to reach here punctually at eleven-thirty o'clock. I will arrange for old Thomas to meet you at the gate, and if I am in any way able to hobble, I will take you at once to the dear old man's room. That the matter concerning which he desires to see you is of vital importance, I can only conjecture from the fact that he asks continually if I have written to you; and that he seems to be counting the hours that must elapse until your

coming. I, personally, must confess that I am ashamed to put this extra tax on your generosity, but when you realise how much my dear grandfather's happiness means to me, I feel sure you will pardon the motive which induces me to proffer this more than singular request. Above all, please do not mention this matter to anyone.

Believe me,

Very gratefully yours,

CHRISTINA FARQUHARSON.

To say that I was astonished by this curious effusion would be like describing Niagara as a pretty mill stream. I read and re-read it, and each time was further from understanding it. What business could her grandfather wish to see me about? Why did he desire me to wait upon him at such an extraordinary hour as eleven-thirty at night? Why should old Thomas meet me at the gate and, more extraordinary still, why was I asked to pledge myself to secrecy, when by the etiquette of my profession she should have known that my lips would be sealed? I turned it over and over in my mind, but without arriving at any satisfactory decision on the subject. I am quite willing to admit that I admired the young lady; at the same time, however, I knew next to nothing about her,

and I had no desire to be drawn into any business that might prejudice my private or professional reputation. Taken big and large, as the sailors say, it had an air of mystery that was far from being agreeable to me, and yet, at the back of it all, was the knowledge that Miss Farquharson and her grandfather stood most urgently in need of my assistance. The more I considered upon it, the more convinced I became that my dusky friend, Monsieur Hippolyte D'Iberville, was in a large measure responsible for the trouble. If that were so, however, what did he hope or expect to gain by it? The very loathing I entertained for the man made me the more desirous of circumventing him, always provided if it were in any way possible for me to do so.

"I trust your letter has not brought you bad news?" said my mother, when I had folded it up and placed it in my pocket. "I can see by your face that you are troubled about something."

"I am somewhat perplexed, I must confess," I answered. "However, I suppose it will all come right sooner or later. Don't you worry about me, mother; it is only a little matter of business which I don't quite understand, and am annoyed with for that very reason. I have no doubt but that I shall be able to bring it to a successful conclusion in the end. These things have a curious faculty of

righting themselves if, as the saying goes, you give them time and rope enough."

Though I spoke so confidently, however, I was far from being easy in my mind. It was plain upon the face of it, that I was being called in to advise on a matter of grave emergency and, as I have said, my innate distrust of the younger D'Iberville, and the curious story he had told me that morning, warned me to be more than cautious how I proceeded, if I desired to come out of it with any sort of credit to my client and myself. Up to that time my profession had been, if I may so express it, of the jog-trot description. The mysterious in a measure and the criminal in particular, had not entered into it. It looked now as if I were to derive new experiences which might—or might not—cause me an infinity of worry and trouble. You might very well ask me why I did not abandon it there and then. But when the notion entered my brain, the recollection of a sweet, girlish face seemed to look out at me through a gauzy veil of mist and I could hear a musical voice saying, "I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for all you have done for me, Mr. Dennison." After that, as I have no doubt you will readily understand, the matter was to all intents and purposes decided for me—willy-nilly. For the first time in my life I began to think I was

really and truly in love. I glanced across the room at my mother, knitting so calmly in her comfortable chair, and I do not hesitate to say that the look upon my face as I did so was a guilty one. It was just as if I had shouted my secret to the listening world, and was ashamed to find it known. Of all my mother's good qualities, one of the most conspicuous, and one the importance of which could not be over-estimated, was that of knowing when not to ask questions. She had learnt this from my father. In the present instance she saw that I was troubled about something, and yet, even if she felt curious, she gave no sign of desiring to know the reason of it all. It was sufficient for her that I declared it to be a matter of business, and in our household "business" had always been a sacred subject.

We dined together punctually at seven o'clock, and shortly after ten I bade her "good-night" and set off on my walk to "The Crag."

As some sort of proof of the manner in which I regarded the appointment I was about to keep, I might record the fact that, prior to leaving the house, I loaded an old-fashioned revolver which had been the property of my father, and dropped it into my coat pocket. From this it must not be inferred that I anticipated any hostility from old Mr. Farquharson. There were, however, the

D'Ibervilles, father and son, to be considered, and I do not mind admitting that for one of them, at least, I entertained a profound distrust.

It was a dark and blustery night, and the wind came hurtling down from the fells in long, shrieking gusts that made walking not only unpleasant, but occasionally difficult. For me, however, the road was so familiar that the darkness itself made scarcely any difference. During the time that I was on the way I had plenty of leisure to think over the facts of the case, as far as I knew them. That they were extraordinary, it must be admitted by everyone who has had the patience to read so far as I have written. Old Mr. Farquharson was a character in himself; I had met and rescued his granddaughter under the strangest circumstances, I was unable to account for the presence of the two half-casts on his property, and, stranger than all, was the interview I had had with the younger of that extraordinary pair that morning. When I was some two miles from my destination the moon rose above the hill tops, and with her coming the wind dropped as if by magic. So brilliant was her light that I was able quite distinctly to see the face of my watch when I consulted it. It appeared that I had still some twenty-five minutes to spare and, as I realised this fact, I pulled up at a stile, and, leaning upon it, surveyed the valley. Every detail

of the scene, as I saw it then, is vividly impressed upon my memory—the placid surface of the river, which flowed a hundred yards or so on my left, the bold outline of the fell, and the white ribbon of road before and behind me, are photographed on my brain to this day as clearly as if it had all happened but yesterday. Good reason have I to remember it all, as you will presently discover.

For upwards of ten minutes I smoked my pipe beside the stile in question, and then proceeded on my way down the hill towards the curious old house that was destined to play such an important part in my life's history.

So well had I timed matters that almost precisely at half-past eleven I found myself at the entrance gates of "The Crag." By this time the moon was once more obscured by clouds, and a thin drizzle was beginning to fall. It struck me that before I reached home again I should, in all probability, be soaked to the skin. It would not, however, be the first occasion in my life that such a thing had befallen me, and it would, in all probability, not be the last. We Lake folk soon become accustomed to such minor inconveniences and, though they may lay up the seeds of rheumatism for old age, we have but small attention to spare for them at the time.

Having found the gate, I passed inside and took

up a position among the shrubs on the left hand of the drive, whence I should be able to see old Thomas when he should come down to meet me, and at the same time to remain hidden myself in case anyone less desirable put in an appearance. I doubt whether I could have counted a hundred slowly before the sound of the old man's shuffling footsteps reached my ears. Then his bent figure came into view. He approached the gate and leant upon it, looking the road up and down as if in search of me, though I doubt very much if he could have seen the bank on the other side of it, even with his spectacles on. In order not to keep him waiting longer than was necessary, I stepped out of hiding and accosted him.

"It seems we are both punctual, Thomas," I said, and with a "Lawk-ha-mussy, Mr. Dennison, sir, how you do frighten a body, to be sure," he wheeled round and confronted me.

"You expected to see me, then?"

"I shouldn't be here if I hadn't," was his curt reply. "I have been up and down this here blessed drive this twenty times, thinkin' you might have come before your time. There's 'Miss Christina waiting for ye up at the house, as if ye were the only man in the world, and the old master worritin' himself into a fever because he thinks ye'll not put in your appearance. And look at me

now, nigh upon seventy years of age and I've walked a good fifteen miles this blessed day if I have walked a yard. What it's all a-comin' to, goodness only knows, and them black-faced villains hangin' around the place seekin' whom they may devour, so to speak—drat 'em! But there—there—we're wastin' time a-palaverin' here in the rain and the cold, to say nothin' of who may be about watchin' and listenin' to what we be a-saying of. If it's your pleasure, sir, we'll be gettin' up to the house."

I agreed to his proposal with all the willingness in the world, and two or three minutes later we had entered the quaint old building by a side door. Strange as it had appeared to me on the occasion of my previous visit two days before, it seemed even more extraordinary now. The dark passages, the wainscoted walls, and the apparent lack of any sort of artistic comfort, had a curious, and if I must confess it, a depressing effect upon me. Taken in conjunction with the lateness of the hour, the long walk which the appointment involved, the remembrance of the dusky D'Ibervilles, and, to sum it all up, the secrecy of the entire business, would have been sufficient to damp the ardour of the immortal Mark Tapley himself.

In the apartment which by courtesy, but no other reason, would probably have been termed the

drawing-room, I found Miss Christina seated by the fire awaiting me. That she had not yet recovered from her accident I could see from the way in which she rose from the chair to receive me. But, if I wanted any recompense for the trouble I had been put to, I got it from the smile of welcome that made its appearance on her face. She gave me her hand with a friendliness that was unmistakable.

"It is good indeed of you to put yourself out in this way," she said. "My grandfather has been most anxiously awaiting your coming, though, as I told you in my letter, I have not the least idea of what he wants with you; yet, of course, I conjecture that it must be a matter of importance, since he has taken so much trouble to arrange an appointment, particularly at such a late hour. I do not mind telling you, Mr. Dennison, that I feel more than a little nervous about him. There is some mystery behind it all which I have tried in vain to fathom, and which is exercising a serious effect upon him."

"You refer, I presume, to the Messieurs D'Iberville," I answered, and had no sooner said it than I began to wonder whether I had made a mistake in mentioning them at all. I soon discovered, however, that I had not, for her reply

convinced me, not only that she was well acquainted with them, but that she liked them as little as I did.

"Those awful men," she said, clasping her hands convulsively as she spoke. "They terrify me."

"May I ask how long you have known them?"

"I never saw them until a few days ago," was her immediate reply. "I believe, however, my grandfather has been acquainted with the elder for many years. But how is it that you know anything about them, Mr. Dennison?"

"Well, in the first place, I saw them walking in the grounds here the day before yesterday, and I was curious enough to wonder what business they could have upon your grandfather's property. I was by no means prepossessed in their favour, so that you may imagine my surprise when I learnt that the younger had called at my house twice yesterday in the hope of seeing me, and that he again made his appearance this morning."

She looked very grave on hearing this.

"What on earth can it all mean?" she asked. "My grandfather is an old man. Nevertheless, he is not one who is easily frightened. Yet he seems terrified of them. But here I am keeping you talking, when I ought to be taking you to him."

"Do you think you can manage to get upstairs—lame, as you are?"

"Of course I can," she replied, with a little laugh. "Do you suppose that I always want to be carried?"

For some inexplicable reason, for which, being an ordinary male man, I am necessarily unable to account, she paused abruptly and her face flushed a rosy red.

"Let us go upstairs," she said, and once more got on to her feet with the aid of her stick. I prepared to offer her my arm, but she would not accept it. My experience of the feminine character had not then been sufficient to make me see what I should have done under the circumstances, so I followed her meekly out of the room, feeling very much like a naughty schoolboy who is about to receive chastisement at the hands of his teacher. Yet, to this day, I cannot understand in what way I had offended.

On reaching the landing at the top of the stairs, she led me towards a door at the further end, immediately opposite that of the room to which I had carried her two days before. When she knocked upon the panel, a voice from within bade us enter. We did so, to find Mr. Farquharson sitting up, propped with pillows, in one of the most

extraordinary tester bedsteads I ever remember to have seen, even in our old-fashioned part of the country. If he had looked frail on the day on which I had made his acquaintance, he appeared to be doubly so now. His complexion, and the white hair which straggled from beneath his night-cap were in perfect harmony with the bed sheets; his withered hands lay on either side of him. Only his dark eyes afforded relief to the weird effect of his personality. Had they been closed, one might very well have been excused had one believed him to be a corpse.

"Grandfather, Mr. Dennison has been able to come to you after all," said Miss Farquharson, as she approached the bedside.

"I am vastly indebted to you, Mr. Dennison," he said, giving me his right hand. "I feel that I owe you an apology for bringing you such a distance at such an hour. I repeat that I am very sensible of the obligation I am under to you. Leave us alone together, Christina, my dear, and be good enough to see that some supper is ready for our friend when he comes downstairs. I shall not detain you, sir, longer than I can help."

Miss Farquharson left the room and, when I had closed the door upon her, I drew up a chair to the bedside and prepared to listen to what he had to

say to me. The whole affair was so extraordinary that I could scarcely believe that it was not a dream from which I should presently awake.

"In the first place, Mr. Dennison," said the old gentleman, speaking in a low voice, as if he were desirous of not being overheard, "I should inform you that I have not asked you to pay me this most uncommon visit without a very good reason. I should like, if you will permit me, to tell you, without flattery, that enquiries have made your cleverness known to me."

"With your permission, my cleverness can wait until you have tested it," I observed, a little curtly, when he paused. "If you will be kind enough to acquaint me with the nature of the business concerning which you desire to consult me, I shall be better able to judge of what I can do for you. Am I right in supposing that it is in any way connected with the Messieurs D'Iberville?"

He uttered an exclamation that was undoubtedly not only one of astonishment, but also of a fear that was almost akin to terror.

"What do you know of them, Mr. Dennison?" he cried, in his excitement, speaking louder than he had yet done.

I thereupon told him of the visit the younger of the pair had paid me earlier in the day. The effect my information produced upon him was startling,

to say the least of it. I heard him catch his breath as a man does when he steps into an icy cold bath. This was succeeded by a violent fit of trembling. More than a minute elapsed before he had recovered sufficient composure to be able to speak again. From his curious behaviour it was more than evident to me that the dread he entertained for these two dusky individuals was by no means exaggerated. But I had yet to discover the reason that made him so afraid of them, and also what it was that had brought the younger D'Iberville to me. Had the latter by any chance got wind of the old gentleman's intention to consult me and had endeavoured to forestall him? It certainly looked as if this were the case, and yet again, supposing that were so, what was the reason of it all? Had it not been for Miss Christina, I could have found it in my heart to decline to have anything whatsoever to do with the business.

"Mr. Dennison," said the old gentleman at last, "if those two men come to know of this meeting between us, my life will not be worth five minutes' purchase. You can have no idea what villains they are. There is nothing they would not attempt in order to carry out their fiendish plots against me. I could tell you things about them which you, who have lived your life in this peaceful old country, would not be able to credit. The

father was an unscrupulous rascal when I first had the misfortune to meet him forty years ago, and he has not improved with time. The son, however, bids fair to outdo him. They are both devoid of pity and compunction."

"You say there is no truth in the statement the latter made to me that at one time you were partners in a venture out of which a large fortune was made?"

"There is not a vestige of truth in his assertion that we were partners," he replied emphatically. "It is true, however, that during my stay in America I embarked in a venture of considerable magnitude, which would have proved successful had I been permitted to carry it out. The elder of these two rascals, however, managed by some means or another to hear of it, and at once set to work to try and cheat me out of what I should have made. Anything like the persecution I endured at his hands I could not make you believe. Try how I would I could not rid myself of him. As soon as the son was old enough he came to his father's assistance, and the case became even worse than before. For nearly fifteen years this villainous treatment has continued, until I was compelled to abandon any attempt to obtain my fortune, and was even forced to stealthily leave America in order to save my wretched life. That was five years ago.

During that time I and my granddaughter, whose father and mother were both dead, have been wanderers on the face of the earth—dogged from place to place, and country to country by these bloodthirsty wolves and their spies. Every force that malignity and cunning could bring to bear upon me was exerted in order to induce me to divulge my secret, but without success. If I was not to be permitted to enter upon and enjoy my own property I was determined that they should not do so. I migrated to South Africa, but they followed me there; I fled to Italy, where I was warned that I should be assassinated if I did not divulge my secret. The last attempt was made in Spain, where I had rented a small house on the outskirts of the town of Cordova. This time I felt sure I should not be traced—nevertheless they managed to find me out, though how they did so Heaven alone knows—but the fact remains that they discovered me within three months, and an attempt was made to make me prisoner with the help of brigands. Being unsuccessful in this they endeavoured to seize my granddaughter, but thank God this plot also failed. I appealed to the authorities for protection, but they were either unwilling or unable to stand by me. I was accordingly compelled to leave the country as secretly as possible. Where to go next in order

to be safe from them I could not think. At last I decided to come to Old England and settle down in some quiet out-of-the-way village, where I should at least enjoy the security of English law and justice. I came and at length found myself installed in his house—with what result? Only to find that those villains had again run me to earth.”

“May I ask when these two diabolical individuals arrived?” I enquired, for by this time I was beginning to take quite an interest in the case, although I did not for the life of me see how I was going to be of assistance in it. To be more candid, I must admit that I could not altogether convince myself as to the old gentleman’s *bona-fides*. It may have been his reticence concerning the nature of the speculation in which he had been involved that made me in a measure distrustful, though personally I incline to the belief that it was his association in any capacity with the two D’Ibervilles that was in the main responsible for it.

As he did not appear to have heard my question, I repeated it in a slightly different form.

“May I ask when they arrived?”

“Last Monday,” he answered. “And since that moment I have not known a moment’s peace of mind. I cannot sleep for thinking of them. I live in a state of constant terror. Almost every sound

I hear is suggestive of them. They have called at the house, and I have been compelled to see them. While outwardly polite, they have allowed me plainly to understand that they are prepared to take any steps to achieve their purpose. Ah! Mr. Dennison, I am an old man, and you see how powerless I am. But it is not so much of my own safety I am thinking, but of my granddaughter's—my son's only child—my sweet Christina. On last Tuesday the father had the audacity to come to me and to propose a compromise. Provided I would agree to induce my darling to marry his devil of a son" (here the old man ground his teeth in impotent rage) "and that I would at the same time disclose my secret and sign a bond to the effect that I would divide half the profits between the two niggers, they on their side would allow me to retain the other half and would refrain from molesting me in the future. It was to be also understood that at my death Christina should have everything I had to leave. Was there ever a more monstrous proposal made to a man? If so, I have never heard of it!"

"And what was your reply to this extraordinary demand?" I asked with curiosity.

"It was short but to the point. I ordered him out of my house forthwith, and gave him to understand that if he or his son dared to set foot on my

premises or to molest me or mine again in any way I would place the matter in the hands of the police, and see what they could do for me. Now you can understand why I was so anxious when she went hunting that day and did not return until so late."

He paused suddenly.

"My God! what's that?" he whispered hoarsely, and as he did so my ears, which were preternaturally sharp that night, distinctly caught the sound of a rough and peculiar scraping noise outside the window. It was just as if a ladder which had been placed against the sill was being cautiously withdrawn.

"There is someone outside the window," I cried, and sprang to my feet.

Old Mr. Farquharson sank back upon his pillows with a face even whiter than I had yet seen it.

"They have been spying upon us," he muttered, and I give you my word that I scarcely recognized his voice, so surcharged with terror was it.

I hastened to the window, threw it open and looked out.

CHAPTER V

THOUGH in my own mind I was as certain as I could well be of anything that the noise which had caused old Mr. Farquharson so much alarm was that of a ladder being either placed against, or removed from, the bedroom window, when I came to look out I could see nothing of such a useful, but what would have been in this case a most objectionable article. In the faint moonlight I could make out the stunted laurel bushes on the bed below and the conifers on the lawn beyond. But of a human figure, or such a thing as a ladder, I could discover no trace. At the risk of giving the venerable gentleman a chill I remained at the open window peering out, forgetting for the moment, like the idiot I was, that while my sphere of vision was necessarily limited, my own figure would be plainly observable to anyone who might be watching from the garden below. This fact

presently dawned upon me, whereupon I promptly withdrew my head, shut the window, and lowered the blind.

"You did not see anyone, of course?" said the old man with a groan when I returned to his bedside.

"Not a sign of a human being," I replied. "If there was anyone there he managed his escape very dexterously."

"Of course he did," was the curt rejoinder. "They are far too clever for us. You have no idea of the sort of people they are. As I told you just now, Satan himself could not exceed them either in cunning or in wickedness. But I have learned by experience not only to fear them but almost to admire them for the dexterity of their knavery. In all probability they have satisfied themselves that you are here, and they will accordingly take steps to cope with you."

"Please don't worry about me," I answered. "I can assure you that I don't fear them." But as I said it I realized that what I had said was far from being the truth. As a matter of fact, what I had heard of them would have been quite sufficient to have made any man feel uncomfortable at incurring their enmity. My client gave utterance to a little croaking laugh.

"Wait until you find a knife thrust in between

your shoulders in some dark lane," he said. "It will be time enough then for you to say whether you're afraid of them or not. However, it's not good policy on my part to endeavour to dissuade you from helping me, and for that reason I won't do it. Please God, with your assistance I will beat them yet. If I cannot save myself I will at least rescue my darling from their clutches. Now let us get to business once more; but we must talk quietly, for we don't know who may be listening. Have you any questions you would like to put to me?"

This was the opportunity for which I had been waiting, and I hastened to avail myself of it.

"I must confess that there is one question I should like to ask you. Of course it is for you to say whether you care to answer it or not."

"What is your question? If it will materially assist the matter in hand you may count upon my answering it to the best of my ability. I should be more than foolish if I did not."

"Well, it concerns the speculation you spoke of to me just now, and which I take it is the pivot on which the whole matter turns. Are you prepared to furnish me with any information concerning it? I mean as to its nature; whether it is connected with real estate, stocks, shares, or what not?"

As I put the question to him I saw his face harden.

"You must forgive me," he said almost angrily, "but that is a question which I am not prepared to answer, and for reasons which I cannot specify even to you. Nor do I see that my refusal can affect the subject sufficiently to make it an obstacle to our doing business together."

Once more my suspicions were aroused. However, he knew his own business best, and if he did not care to tell me, and any loss should accrue to him or his through his failure to do so, the responsibility would rest on his shoulders, thank goodness, and not on mine.

"In that case I have only to ask you to inform me what it is you wish me to do for you."

He seemed so much relieved by the way I had taken his rebuff that, when he spoke again, it was in a kindlier tone than he had yet used towards me. But that he was still nervous I could easily see.

"What I want, you to do for me, though the issues it involves are so important, is really a very simple matter. In the first place, I want you to draw up my will, and word it as carefully and ~~as~~ guardedly as you can. To begin with, I desire to leave everything I die possessed of to my granddaughter for her sole use and benefit. She must be at liberty to realize on the whole or any portion

of it as she may at any time think fit, and be held accountable to no one for so doing. The legal phraseology I, of course, leave in your hands. All I ask is that the document shall be such that it may be taken into any court of law either in this country or America, without fear of being declared invalid or in any way disputable. My one desire is to leave no loophole for the other side to creep through in order to ruin her."

I gazed at him with complete astonishment.

"Surely, Mr. Farquharson," I said, "you do not wish me to believe that you brought me out here at this time of night merely to take instructions for drawing your will? I could have done that at any other time and with less inconvenience to myself."

If I am to be a veracious chronicler I must here admit that I felt decidedly angry with him for what I considered his most absurd treatment. A mere note embodying the terms and delivered to me by old Thomas would have been quite sufficient. At any rate it would have saved me a twelve-mile walk, to say nothing of the chance of being murdered by those amiable gentlemen of whom I had every reason to know he stood in such deadly fear. But, as I was about to learn, I had by no means reached the bottom of the mystery yet.

"Your pardon, Mr. Dennison," he said, and as he did so he leant towards me in the bed, "but you do me a slight, though probably unintentional injustice. Believe me, I should not be so discourteous to you as to put you to such wanton inconvenience." Once more his voice dropped to a whisper. "The will was one portion of my business with you, but the other, believe me, is a great deal more important. For some reason which I cannot explain, seeing that while I know you by repute, I have only met you once before, I am prepared to put such trust in you as I have never reposed in any other human being in my long and somewhat adventurous career."

"Your compliments overwhelm me," I said with unconcealed sarcasm. "I trust I may prove worthy of your confidence."

I waited for him to continue.

Nearly two minutes must have elapsed before he did so. It was evident that, in the meanwhile, he was pondering something in his mind, but what that something was I, of course, could not conjecture.

"When will it be possible for you," he at length continued, "to let me have the will for my perusal and signature?"

"On Monday without fail, if that will suit you?" I replied. "I am afraid, as this is Friday

and I am exceedingly busy, I cannot promise it before."

"Monday will suit me admirably," he answered. "Always provided that these villains do not succeed in terminating my existence in the meantime. And now one other question. How could you convey it to me? To be plain with you, I do not think it would be advisable for you to bring it yourself, while it is equally out of the question for me to come to you."

"I could send one of my clerks with it," was my reply. "A man who could be trusted."

He shook his head.

"I am afraid that would not do either. Is there no other way?"

"I have it," I observed, for an idea had occurred to me which seemed satisfactory in more ways than one. "My mother will drive out to call upon Miss Farquharson on Monday, and she can bring it with her and return it to me when you have duly executed it. Your manservant and your cook would witness it."

"Your plan is a good one and I thank you for it. And now to the other and still more important matter. On Wednesday morning next would it be possible for you to be at Windermere railway station in time to meet the train from the South which arrives at 9.45?"

"That would not be a difficult matter to arrange," I answered, wondering what all this was leading up to. "But what am I to do when I get there?"

"I will tell you. In the first place you will take up your position near the booking-office, and from that place keep a sharp look out for a man of about forty years of age with a flaming red beard and an extraordinary profusion of freckles. His appearance will resemble that of a gentleman farmer, and he will carry a stout stick in his right hand and a mackintosh over his left arm. He will approach you and, after consulting his watch, will ask whether you can direct him to the residence of a certain Mr. Carlingford."

"But I know no one of that name in the town," I replied. "In fact I do not remember ever to have heard the name in my life."

"That is exactly why it is chosen," remarked this extraordinary old man. "If it had been Brown, Jones or Robinson, you might have doubted the identity of the messenger. Such an uncommon name as Carlingford should prove to you that he is the individual you are to meet."

"I understand," I replied, "and when he has asked me the question what am I to say or do?"

"You will say that you are not aware that there

is such a person in the town, but you will be obliging enough to offer to take him to someone who may possibly be better informed. You will leave the station together, and once outside you will hand him a credential which I am going to give you now."

Here he fumbled under his pillow and presently produced a pocket-book from which he took a tiny scrap of paper, which he passed to me. I glanced at it and found it to be a Nicaraguan stamp of the 1869 issue. On the reverse side was something resembling the capital letter S, composed of small dots printed in red ink. In the curves of the letter—if by that term I can describe it—were two words or hieroglyphics that bore a distinct resemblance to Arabic.

"Guard that stamp as you would your life," he said as impressively as if it were the Crown of England or the Great Seal he was committing to my care. "Should they learn that you have it in your possession they will stick at nothing in order to obtain it, and in that case all will be lost so far as Christina and I are concerned."

For the sake of greater security I secreted it in the safest place I could think of—that is to say, in my watch case—and having done so awaited his further instructions.

"On receipt of that guarantee of your *bona-fides*

the man will give you a carefully-sealed envelope, which I beg of you to place in the hands of your banker or in your own strong room, as may seem best in your judgment. I am an old man and, in the natural course of things, cannot hope to live very much longer, but it is possible, only too possible, I fear, that my span of life may be cut short by my enemies at any moment. Should that happen my granddaughter will communicate with you at once, whereupon I desire that my will should be proved as soon as possible, and also that the envelope which I am entrusting to your care shall be handed to her. She will then be able to consult you as to her future course of action or not as she may think fit. For my own part I hope she will avail herself of your good offices, for I feel sure that she could not be in better hands. Now tell me, Mr. Dennison, whether you are prepared to undertake the responsibility of doing what I ask or not? That it is a responsibility, and a very grave one, I think you will admit."

There could be no doubt about this fact, and for that reason I took time before I replied. Then the picture of the girl's sweet face rose before me, and I reflected how lonely she would be in the world should her grandfather be taken from her, as might at any moment be the case.

"Yes," I said, "I will undertake it, and if any-

thing should happen to you as you seem to fear, I give you my word that I will help Miss Farquharson to the very best of my ability."

"From the bottom of my heart I thank you for that assurance," was his rejoinder, and his voice trembled a little as he spoke the words. "I felt sure from the first that I could trust myself and my dear one in your hands, and I am glad indeed to find that I was not mistaken. For this interview, drawing my will, and attending at the station to receive the envelope in question, you will of course render me your account in the usual way, and when the time comes for that envelope to be opened—whether I am alive or not—you will discover that my gratitude to you is something more than an empty phrase."

I thanked him without much enthusiasm for the assurance and then, realising that the interview had reached its conclusion, rose to take leave of him.

"Good night, Mr. Dennison," he said, "and believe me, I shall sleep the better now that I have arranged matters so satisfactorily with you. I wish I could have put you up for the night, but I fear that is out of the question. I would, however, beg of you to be more than careful during your homeward walk."

Having promised to remember his advice, I

shook him by the hand and bade him good-bye. As I closed the door behind me I felt that I was doing so on what was certainly one of the most curious interviews I had ever had with a client. On my way downstairs I looked at my watch and discovered that it wanted only a few minutes of one o'clock. Yet when I reached the hall below, there was Miss Christina waiting to receive me.

"You should not have remained up," I said, noting how tired she looked. "You will be fit for nothing to-morrow, or rather, I should say, to-day."

"And pray what about yourself, Mr. Dennison?" she asked with a wan little smile. "You must have had a tiring talk with my grandfather, and now you have a long walk before you. But come into the dining-room and let me give you some supper before you go. I am sure you must stand in need of it."

I followed her into the room in question, where I found that a substantial meal had been laid for me. Contenting myself with cold beef, pickles, and bottled beer, and waited on by my fair hostess, I made a meal fit for a king. From the graciousness of her manner towards me it was evident that Miss Christina had quite recovered from her little fit of anger.

"I suppose old Thomas has gone to bed," I said. "I should like to have seen him before I left. There is something I am anxious to say to him."

"No, you may be quite sure," she answered, "that he has not retired. In spite of his apparent surliness, he is really a very faithful old fellow, and would no more think of leaving me alone down here at this hour of the night than he would of flying. I will find him and tell him to come to you."

But for two reasons I would not hear of this. The first was that it would put her to the pain of walking, and the second was that I wanted to interview the old man alone; in which case she would either have been compelled to remain in the kitchen or to wait in the cold hall outside. I therefore declared that I would go in search of the old man myself, and advised her to be off to bed as soon as possible. But she in her turn would not hear of this. She had something she wished to ask me, it appeared, and she declared that she would wait for me in the dining-room until I had seen old Thomas.

Seeing that it was useless to argue with her, I set off for the kitchen, where I found the man I wanted sitting in an arm-chair, fast asleep, before the fire. So soundly was he slumbering indeed

that it was fully a minute before I could wake him. When I did so he looked up at me with such a stare of astonishment that it was as much as I could do to refrain from laughing.

"Look here, Thomas," I said, "I want to have an important talk with you."

For the moment I had forgotten that he was so deaf. I was very soon, however, reminded of the fact. Having closed the kitchen door behind me, I led him to the further end of the room, and speaking slowly, but impressively, also as loudly as I dared, tried to give him some notion of the position of affairs as they stood at that moment in the house.

"It's them dod-rabbited D'Ibervilles again," he muttered vindictively, wagging his head like a China joss. "Until they's shot, drowned, or hung there'll be no peace for mortal soul in this here family. And do I understand you to say, sir, that one of 'em has been hangin' round the house to-night?"

I told him of the sound outside the window that old Mr. Farquharson and I had both thought we heard, but, strange to say, it did not seem to convince him as I had expected it would do. He shook his grey head repeatedly and said, "'Tain't like 'em, sir. No! no! 'Tain't like 'em. They wouldn't try that sort o' game on. Why, if there

had been a ladder there, you might ha' caught one on 'em upon it, and how would they have looked then, seein' you be a lawyer and well bekknown in these parts. Besides, sir, and beggin' your pardon for makin' so free, but there isn't a ladder that would reach up to master's window to be found within a good three miles of this des'late old place. You may be sure as they wouldn't carry it so far as that just on the chanst of seein' master in bed."

"Say what you like, Thomas," I retorted, "I feel perfectly certain, and so does your master, that someone was there. What his business was, or how he managed to procure a ladder I am not in a position to say. The fact, however, remains that we heard the noise, and my object in coming to the kitchen to see you is to warn you to take care that the house is properly locked up to-night. It is impossible to say who may or who may not be about, and for your master and young mistress' sake it behoves you to be careful."

At that moment I chanced to look across the room at the window at the further end. For some reason—probably to be only accounted for by the carelessness which had allowed the whole house to go to rack and ruin—it possessed no blind, and old Mr. Farquharson, being only a quarterly tenant, had not gone to the expense of providing one. As I have said, I looked across the room at

this window and, as I did so, I became for a moment as if I were turned to stone. Framed in the square of one of the upper panes of glass, and with the light shining full upon it, was a man's face, and as I hope to be believed for a sane man, it was the face of Hippolyte D'Iberville. There could not have been any mistake about it. I clutched old Thomas by the arm and pointed. That he saw what I saw was evident from the way in which he caught his breath and then muttered "God ha' mercy" which followed it. Then the face vanished and we stood looking at each other in a state of absolute stupefaction. My previous assertion had been corroborated in a most unexpected and highly unpleasant fashion. I turned to Thomas to discover what he thought of it, and found him still staring at the window with a complexion akin to the colour of zinc. It was evident that he was as frightened as his master had been an hour or so before.

Not daring to shout at him, I took a piece of paper from my pocket and wrote in large characters upon it, "You believe me now, I hope?" He nodded his head in answer. Once more I wrote, "I have changed my mind and shall stay here till day-break. Go round and see that all the doors and windows are carefully fastened. In the meantime I am going back to the dining-room to bid Miss

Christina good night, after which I shall pretend to go away. In reality I shall have a look round the grounds to see if I can find anyone there. When I knock three times on the side door be ready to let me in. Are you quite sure that you understand?"

"I do, sir," he whispered, "and you may be sure I'll be there. I bless you, sir, for standing by us. We might all have been murdered in our beds by morning."

Having seen him depart, candle in hand, I in my turn made my way back to the dining-room in search of Miss Christina.

"I am afraid I have kept you waiting an unconscionable time," I said, "but old Thomas was fast asleep and I had to rouse him, which, as perhaps you may be aware, is no easy matter. And now I must really be going home, and you must be off to bed."

"I am so sorry that you should have such a long and dreary walk before you," she said. "I confess I feel horribly guilty for having been in a great measure the cause of it. But you see my grandfather wished to see you so much, so that there was nothing for it but for me to write as he told me. Perhaps in time you may be able to forgive me?"

"Don't be too sure of that," I answered, pre-

tending to be very stern. "A young lady who keeps a young man out until nearly three in the morning should surely be punished with the rack and thumbscrews. But in consideration of your sprained ankle I will forgive you this time, always provided, as we lawyers say, that you give me your promise never to offend in such a manner again."

"I hope I may never be called upon to do so," was her reply, and there was a note of sadness in her voice as she said it for which, when I came to think over it afterwards, I found it difficult to account. "I have so few friends in the world that I cannot afford to run the risk of losing one of them."

"Then I am to congratulate myself on the belief that you are prepared to look upon me as a friend?" I replied.

"Have you not already proved yourself one?" she said. "To begin with, you practically saved my life on the fell the other day, and you have allowed yourself to be put to all sorts of inconvenience on my account, and on each occasion without exercising your sex's privilege, which is——"

"To grumble, you mean. Well, it is evident that, for once in my life, I have been original. I must not do it too often or my friends will begin to believe that there is something the matter with

me. We are not accustomed to that sort of thing in this out-of-the-way part of the world."

As I said this I moved towards the door, hoping that I should be able to make my escape before she could put the question to me of which she had spoken prior to my departing in search of the worthy but surly Thomas. I was bargaining, however, without my hostess. She was not the sort of young lady to be put off so easily. She followed me quickly and placed her little hand upon my arm as if to detain me.

"Mr. Dennison," she said, speaking in a low voice, "are you in a position to tell me what it is that has so upset my grandfather. For the last two or three days he has not been himself at all, and I am very anxious about him. Remember he is the only relative I have left in the world."

Here I found myself placed in a most uncomfortable dilemma. What I was to say I could not for the life of me imagine. It was impossible for me to tell her the truth, and yet to keep her in the dark seemed not only cruel, but also, under the circumstances, the reverse of polite. She noticed my hesitation, and the hopeful look died out of her face. I cast about me for a way out of the difficulty, and at last decided on the only course of action it was possible for me to adopt.

"Miss Farquharson," I said, softly closing the

door I had opened, "you gave me to understand when I arrived this evening that you had but lately become acquainted with these D'Ibervilles. I am sure I can trust you not to think for a moment that I am doubting your veracity—far from it—but I want you to give the matter very careful consideration and tell me on looking back whether you are quite sure that you cannot remember having seen them until you met them here the other day."

"I am perfectly sure of it," she replied. "Is it likely that having once seen them I should fail to recollect the fact? Thank Heaven, one does not meet such terrible looking people every day. But why do you ask me the question, Mr. Dennison? Can it be that you think they are plotting any harm against the poor old man upstairs? I implore you to be candid with me!"

"I will be candid with you," I answered. "And that being the case, I tell you at once that I would not trust either of the men as far as I could see them. Your grandfather is an old man, and he is evidently very much afraid of them. If only for that reason they must not be allowed to come near him. Should they do so, I would not care to be answerable for the consequences. Of one thing, Miss Christina, I beg you will rest assured, and that is the fact that I will render you any assistance in my power. Send for me the instant

that you think you need my services, and you may confidently count upon my helping you to the best of my ability."

She held out her little hand to me and I took it and clasped it, possibly for some seconds longer than I should have done. Her eyes met mine with a look of confidence that set my heart beating like a sledge hammer, and if I had any qualms as to the wisdom of the extraordinary responsibility I had taken upon myself, they vanished before it as the shades of night disappear before the rising of the sun. To this day I affirm that, never in this world, was there a sweeter or a prettier maid than Christina Farquharson, and you may take my word for it that that is something for a hard-headed, matter-of-fact North of England solicitor to affirm.

"Mr. Dennison," she was good enough to remark, "you literally heap kindnesses upon me, and the worst of it is, I cannot see how I shall be able to repay them."

"Very well, then, you can begin to liquidate the debt at once," I answered, "by going to bed. I shall bid you good night in order that you may have no excuse."

"Good night—and a thousand thanks to you," she replied. "If ever occasion arises I shall remember what you have said to me."

We passed into the hall together to find old

Thomas awaiting our coming there. He helped me on with my coat, gave me my hat and stick, and then opened the front door for all the world as if I were paying an afternoon call.

A moment later I was out in the dark and stormy night, wondering what the next few minutes would bring forth.

CHAPTER VI

Up to the time when this history commences I feel bound to confess to the fact that my life had been, so far as adventure was concerned, monotonous to a degree. However, it looked very much as if I had now arranged to make up for lost time with a vengeance. My first meeting of the D'Ibervilles, father and son, had, as I have explained, by no means prepossessed me in their favour, and the behaviour of the latter on this particular evening was by no means calculated to increase my liking for them. To wander about a dark and dismal garden at half-past one in the morning, in search of a man, or men, whom I had the best of reasons for believing would shoot or stab me without compunction, is an experience which I venture to believe falls only to the lot of the recognised representatives of law and order—of which courageous body, by the way, I do not happen to be a member. However, with my stick in my left

hand, and my right thrust deep into my great coat pocket and clutching my revolver, I made my way down the drive towards the gate. Once there I stepped into my old hiding place in the shrubbery and waited to see whether the enemy had become aware of my exodus. Ten minutes having elapsed and no one having put in an appearance, I resolved to try back through the garden in case they should be hiding there.

By this time the moon had altogether disappeared, and it was with the utmost difficulty I managed to pick my way through the tangled shrubbery back to the western side of the house. Indeed, I had not gone very far before I realized what an absurd quest I had embarked upon. A hundred men might have hidden themselves in that overgrown wilderness and I should have been none the wiser. In the front of the house all the lights were extinguished, and when I reached that on which the side door, by which I was to re-enter, was situated, the faint gleam that filtered out through the kitchen window was all that I had to guide me. Having arrived at the conclusion that it would be worse than useless to continue my search (and at the risk of being thought a coward I am prepared to confess that I was not particularly keen upon doing so), I approached the door and rapped three times upon it with my stick.

Old Thomas's hearing must surely have been more acute than usual, for he immediately opened it to me.

"Did you see anything of them, may I ask, sir?" he whispered, when he had admitted me and had once more made the portal secure.

"Not a sign," I answered, and seeing that he did not appear to hear me, I shook my head.

"Then they're still hangin' about the grounds, I'll be bound to that," he muttered, and forthwith hobbled along the short passage in the direction of the main hall.

Unlocking the dining-room door he waited for me to enter and, when I had done so, closed it carefully behind him. The lamp was still alight upon the centre table and there was also a cheerful fire burning on the hearth. Better still, there was a kettle steaming on the hob, a decanter of whisky, a lemon and a bowl of sugar awaiting my attention on the sideboard.

"I thought you'd find a drop or two of spirit a bit comforting like, sir, after your prowl about the garden," observed the old man. "If you'll be good enough to take what you want I'll pour in the hot water."

I insisted, however, that he should join me, and without much pressing he consented to do so.

As we sat sipping our grog I could not help con-

trusting his present affability with his behaviour on the afternoon on which I had carried Miss Christina home from the fell. On that occasion he had regarded me in the light of a mortal enemy; now, here we were hob-nobbing together as if we were lifelong friends. Fortunately, the old gentleman's room and also that of his granddaughter were at the other end of the building, otherwise they must assuredly have heard us talking together—for to make the worthy Thomas hear was like bellowing into a fog horn. At last, however, I managed to make him understand that I was going to lie down on the sofa in the dining-room until dawn, and that he had better remain with me in order that he might let me out of the house when the time came for me to leave it. Five minutes later, with the door on the jar, he was fast asleep in an arm chair, while I was stretched upon the sofa, listening to the creakings of the old house, which might have been haunted by a hundred ghosts from the noises that I heard, and to old Thomas's snoring which I am not quite sure was not worse than ghosts, hobgoblins, and all else put together. The wind howled round the corner of the queer old building—the ivy scratched and rustled on the window panes, and yet these things did not affect me half as much as the thought of a certain beautiful face, whose eyes had that evening looked into

mine with a trustfulness that made me feel as if there were nothing in the wide, wide world I would not and could not do for her. Even the poor, shabbily furnished room in which I lay seemed ennobled by the fact that she had sat in it, and upon my word, if you want the truth, I almost believe I could have found music in old Thomas's nasal trumpeting, if only for the reason that he had proved himself her leal henchman.

Slowly the night wore on, and I can confidently assure you that if ever I fought with drowsiness it was then. I do not know that in all my experience I have ever felt more tired than I did that night. Again and again I found my eyelids closing, and it was only with a supreme effort that I was able to keep them open. Towards three o'clock the wind subsided and a curious and ghostly stillness seemed to take possession of the world. I believe if a leaf had rustled outside I should have heard it. Even old Thomas's snores had dropped to little above a whisper. Up to that time they had been *forte*, now they were *pianissimo*.

Though I noticed with some concern that the lamp was going out, I made no attempt to disturb him.

Suddenly something occurred which brought me up to the realities of the moment with a feeling of absolute consternation. It was the sound of a

stealthy footstep on the gravel outside. In a second I was on my feet and shaking old Thomas by the shoulder. When I had brought him within a measurable distance of comprehending what I was driving at, I pointed to the window and made signs to him to listen. Naturally, however, he could not hear anything. Seeing how deaf he was, and how stealthy the stepping was it would have been strange had he been able to do so. At last I managed to make him understand my meaning. Then I heard it again, if possible a little more distinctly than before.

"Mr. Dennison, sir, may I ask, with all proper respect, what you think is the matter?" whispered the old man. "I don't like these goings on at all."

Neither did I, but I dared not shout at him. Once more I resorted to the expedient of placing my views on paper.

"But what does it all mean, sir?" he replied, mopping and mowing before me as if he had St. Vitus' dance. "What is it keeps them hangin' about here the livelong night?"

"I am afraid they know that I am here," I wrote in reply, "and they want to discover the reason of it."

"This is a bad business," he returned, "a very bad business, and if the poor old master knew it

he would worrit himself into a fever. What do you think is best to be done, sir?"

I shook my head. For the life of me I could not see any solution of the difficulty. To attempt to catch our mysterious visitor would not only have been difficult, but in a certain sense it might have been prejudicial to old Mr. Farquharson's interest and reputation. At first glance this may seem a somewhat extraordinary statement to make, but I think, if you have read between the lines, or in other words, if I have succeeded in placing the matter before you in the light which I intended, you will be able to understand what I mean by the time you have reached the conclusion of my story.

The footsteps had now died away and old Thomas and I stood looking at each other, neither of us knowing quite what to do or say. For my own part I do not mind admitting that I was to all intents and purposes beaten. Never before had I had such a case to deal with, and when I came to examine it critically, I could not for the life of me tell what it was that had induced me to interest myself in it at all.

Conversation with old Thomas being out of the question, I took a Whittaker's almanack, some ten years old, from the book case and settled myself down again on the sofa to study it. Interesting though the information it contains might be, it

gave me but small satisfaction. I studied the births, marriages and deaths of the Royal Family; I familiarised myself with the names and styles of the Lords and Commons, and assimilated a greater variety of miscellaneous information than I shall be able to make use of if I live to be a hundred. All the time I kept my ears wide open for any repetition of the footsteps outside, but I heard no more of them. Either the man was in hiding, or he had given up the quest as hopeless and had gone home. When the clock in the hall struck five I determined to follow his example.

"I do not think there is any need for further anxiety," I said to my fellow watchman. "They will be scarcely likely to trouble you again to-night. Let me out by the back door, and be sure you lock it after me. After that you had better be off to bed as soon as possible."

"Very good, sir," the old fellow replied, "and I don't mind telling you as how I feel as if I could sleep for a month of Sundays."

Once more the same curious expression appeared upon his wrinkled old face that I had noticed before. What it meant I could not for the life of me understand. Worse than all, I could not question him, for my hands were tied by the stringent rules of professional etiquette. From the dining-room I passed into the hall, where I

put on my coat and hat and took my trusty walking stick in my hand. Hilly as the road was, I hoped to be at home at latest by half-past six. I did not look forward to the tramp with any great amount of pleasure, but it had to be accomplished and the sooner it was over and done with the better. With old Thomas following closely at my heels I made my way to the kitchen, where there was a back door opening into the garden.

"You are sure, sir, you won't stay till it gets a bit lighter?" asked the old man as I prepared to pass out.

I shook my head.

"No, I must be getting home," I answered.

"I am late enough as it is. Be sure that the house is carefully locked up and then, as I said just now, get away to bed as soon as you can."

"You may be very sure I'll do that, sir," he replied. "Good night to you, and may you have a safe walk home."

A few moments later I was on my way down the drive, my right hand clutching the revolver in my pocket and quite prepared to see Monsieur Hippolyte D'Iberville jump out at me from any bush on the right and left of the drive. How devoutly I wished myself at home I must leave you to imagine. Fond of walking though I am, this was an experience such as I could very gladly have dispensed

with. I had been through so much during the night that the very thought of my own quiet house, with its peaceful bedroom, was like the recollection of a lost Paradise to me.

As I think I have already told you, on leaving the gates of "The Crag" and turning to the left—that is to say towards Windermere—there is a stiff ascent to be climbed, after which it is, comparatively speaking, fair walking. I had travelled at a brisk pace, and by the time I reached the hill top I must confess to being somewhat out of breath. I therefore came to a standstill and endeavoured to look about me. The night, however, was so dark that it was impossible to see anything. Far down in the valley to my right I could hear the voice of the stream talking to the rocks, while from some spot on the left the curiously short bark of a dog fox, who had probably not been successful in his hunting and was making back to his lair on the hillside in a discontented and quarrelsome frame of mind, came to me. Leaning on the gate where I had paused earlier in the evening I endeavoured to come to some sort of an understanding of the position. That I had been a fool to have allowed myself to be dragged into such a perilous business I was quite prepared to admit, but when that was said and done how did I stand? I had committed myself and, for the life of me, I could not see how

I was to get out of it. Between ourselves, and I believe I have the reputation of being an obstinate man, I'm not quite sure that I was that way inclined.

"Mr. Dennison," said a voice that rang in my ears like sweetest music, "I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you for all you have done for me." Do you imagine that after that I could regret the course of action I had taken up? I leave it to my male readers to say what they would have done had they been situated as I was. To parody a famous writer's assertion, "grey eyes are dangerous toys to play with, for one never knows what the result of looking into them may be." In my case I had no option but to admit that the case was hopeless. I was in love, and what more need be said? You, of course, remember what George Macdonald says:—

Alas! how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too much or a kiss too long;
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.

Knocking the ashes out of my pipe I continued my march, congratulating myself as I went on having emerged so successfully from what I had every right to consider was undoubtedly a most difficult and dangerous position. It seemed to me inexplicable that the D'Ibervilles, knowing that I

was at "The Crag," had not intercepted me, or at any rate that they had not followed me. Chuckling at what I was vain enough to consider my own astuteness, I pushed on at a brisk pace, telling myself that, happen what might, he would be a clever man who should find me up and about before midday.

I had replaced my pipe in my pocket and was commencing my descent of the second hill when something occurred which brought me to a sudden standstill. From behind me came the sound of a human footstep. Evidently I had not the road to myself, however much I might desire to think so. And yet, when I came to consider upon it, it was a curious time for anyone to be abroad. The only people I could think of were the dear old doctor or the mailman, and yet in my heart of hearts I knew that it was scarcely likely to be either of them. Steadily the steps came on, growing louder and louder with every minute. For a moment or two they paused at the summit of the hill, and for reasons that I could easily appreciate. Then they commenced again—and this time, if possible, faster than before. Having no desire for company I, in my turn, quickened my pace, devoutly wishing as I did so that I were at home and in bed. When I had proceeded something like a quarter of a mile I stopped and listened once more. For a

few moments I could hear nothing save the sighing of the wind across the fells—then there reached my ears the pat-pat-patter of the feet behind me. I do not know whether you have ever experienced the nervousness which overtakes some people on such occasions. In my case I can confidently say that the mere rhythm of that footfall haunted me like a ghastly dream. I waited for it, and as I waited I began to weave all sorts of extraordinary fancies into it. Who could it be? Was it possible that it was one of the D'Ibervilles? At the very idea of such a thing a cold sweat broke out on me. The mere thought that that man was on the road at such an hour was too horrible to be contemplated. Once I pushed on, and once more, after proceeding a short distance, I paused to listen. There they came again, those footsteps, and this time it was plain that they were gaining upon me—as a matter of fact they could not have been more than a hundred yards behind me. As a rule I don't think my worst enemy could accuse me of being a nervous man, but I had acquired such a loathing that the very thought of him was nauseating to me to a degree I can give you no idea of. In order to set my mind at rest once and for all I determined upon a strategy. Increasing my speed for about a hundred yards, I managed to increase the distance between us. Then I turned suddenly

into a field and dropped on my hands and knees behind the loose stone wall that bordered it. As I waited I could hear the steps coming every moment closer. Whoever the walker was, he was without doubt in a hurry. At last, and after what seemed an interminable period of waiting, he approached me. If I live to be a hundred I shall not forget that moment. That my suspicions had not been unfounded was conclusively proved, for looking between the roughly piled stones I realized that my pursuer was Hippolyte D'Iberville after all. And the more I considered upon it the less able I was to understand it. Why was he following me? What could he possibly hope to gain by it? He would not, I felt sure, have contemplated attacking me—for I was a good head and shoulders taller than he, and roughly speaking was at least a stone and a half the heavier man. What, therefore, was his purpose? It was a riddle which unhappily I was very far from being able to solve.

I waited until he had passed my hiding place and was descending the hill—after which I, in my turn, took up the chase, keeping at a respectful distance behind him in order that he might not become aware of my presence. In this fashion we progressed until I was within a measurable distance of my own abode. By this time day was beginning to break, a cold, cheerless dawn, with heavy clouds

upon the hilltops and a decided warning of coming snow in the air.

At last I saw ahead of me the dear old gate with its avenue of fir trees. Once more I was at home!

"Well, after all, the thing has ended rather tamely," I said to myself, as if I were disappointed that I had not been murdered on the way. "However, all's well that ends well, and if my charming friend Mr. Hippolyte D'Iberville is satisfied, well, so I suppose I should be."

As we all know, there is an old saying to the effect that it is the unexpected that always happens. It was certainly so in this case, for just as I reached the gate a man opened it and came out. Whether it may strike you as being surprising or not I cannot say. The fact, however, remains that he was none other than the individual who had passed me on the road. As soon as he saw me he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and made as if he would avoid me. My blood, however, was up, and I was resolved to have it out with him once and for all.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what you are doing on my premises at this hour of the morning," I said. For a moment he did not know what answer to make to me. He stood in the centre of the drive looking up and down the road. I could see that he was endeavouring to

frame a lie but did not know quite how to word it.

"I wanted to see you on business," he said.

"The matter is most important."

"It had need to be," I answered. "Only a matter of life or death could excuse a call at this hour of the morning. If I were you, Mr. D'Iberville, I should be very careful. England is not America and America is not England, and if you want a little legal advice, I would warn you that prying into other people's concerns is an unsatisfactory as well as a dangerous proceeding."

"I do not understand you," he said. "What mean you by saying that I pry into other people's concerns?"

"That is a question I decline to answer," I replied. "If you do not know what I mean I am not going to enlighten you."

Never shall I forget the look of rage upon his face as I said this. Had he dared to do so I believe he would have killed me on the spot. I was prepared for him, however.

"I know you," he hissed, "*mille tonneres*, I know you! You think yourself very *clevaire*, but I am more *clevaire* still. You fight for that old man who has ruined my father and me—me, I say, Hippolyte D'Iberville—and I tell you that I will make you suffer for it."

"Get off my grounds," I cried in a sudden burst

of fury. "If I catch you here again I'll hand you over to the police. Try to remember that!"

"The police," he shouted, "you give me to the police? Then you shall have something to give me for."

So saying he ran towards me, drawing a knife from his breast as he did so. Fortunately I was able to catch his wrist in time. Had I not done so there is no saying what might have happened. I had not practised wrestling for nothing, and before he knew where he was I had thrown him upon his back in the road and had shut the gate upon him.

With his eyes nearly starting from his head with rage he rose to his feet and shook his fist at me.

"Wait—wait!" he cried, "I have not done with you yet. I would have made your fortune, but you would not listen. You insulted me—me, me, Hippolyte D'Iberville—and I take insult from no man. I do not forget; you remember what I have said."

I laughed and strode up the drive to the house. A quarter of an hour later I was in bed and fast asleep.

CHAPTER VII

I DON'T think any one could blame me if on the morning following my curious adventure at "The Crag" I remained in bed longer than was perhaps altogether consistent with the reputation of a business man. To tell the truth I was completely worn out, and I doubt very much whether I should have been able to give my attention to anything calling for concentrated mental effort. As a matter of fact, it was nearly eleven o'clock before I came downstairs, and when I did I felt as if I were a hundred years old.

"My dear boy," said my mother, who met me at the foot of the stairs, "how tired you look! Of course I must not intrude upon your business affairs, but I cannot help believing—in fact, one can scarcely help seeing it—that you are worried about something. I know the time that you went out last night, and I was awake when you came in. You have been to "The Crag," and you have seen Miss Farquharson."

What should have made her think of such a thing I cannot say, nevertheless I was compelled to admit that it was the truth. I put my arm round her waist and we passed into the breakfast-room together.

"Mother," I said, "it has always been an accepted rule that we do not discuss business matters at home, but for once in a way I am going to break through it and tell you that I really am seriously worried."

She dropped her knitting into her lap with a little cry.

"My dear boy, you don't know how you frighten me! You don't mean to say that you're thinking of getting married?"

This was more than I had bargained for.

"My dear mother," I said, "you must surely have realized that the time must come sooner or later for me to marry. To be frank with you, I think it only right to tell you that I believe I have now met the one woman who can make me thoroughly happy."

As I write these lines the whole scene rises before me. I can see the brisk fire burning in the grate, the snow falling upon the lawn, and, if one must descend to the prosaic, your obedient servant staring at a dish of eggs and bacon as if he were undecided as to whether he had sufficient appetite

to eat them or not. It is a lamentable, but I suppose a necessary fact, that the majority of mothers are sooner or later called upon to realize that their sons will imitate their fathers' examples, or, in other words, to leave the home nest and settle down in nests of their own.

"Graham," said my mother, as she poured out my tea, "I have always been afraid of this. I did not, however, think you would have made up your mind so quickly."

"And yet, my dearest mother," I retorted, "I believe it is an accepted fact that you fell in love with my father and had promised to become his wife when you had scarcely known him twenty-four hours. Can you blame me if I am courageous enough to follow your example?"

There was just the suspicion of a sob in her voice as she replied—

"Blame you, Graham!" she said. "How can I blame you? You are a man and have a perfect right to do as you please. All I think of is your happiness. You know that. But even mothers cannot help a little feeling of pain when their sons announce their intention of leaving them. Remember, dear, you are all I have left in the world."

Alas! poor mothers! How little we know to what suffering we condemn them! I have often thought since then that that must have been one

of the most bitter hours of her life. I was her only child, and she loved me with a love that falls to the lot of but few men. To find, therefore, that the position she had so long occupied in my heart was to be usurped by another must have cut her to the quick, but in my selfishness—and selfishness it could only have been—I did not pause to consider that.

“I must take the earliest opportunity of making Miss Farquharson’s acquaintance,” she said, and as she did so I noticed that her lips trembled a little. “I shall then be better able to judge whether she is or is not worthy of my boy.”

“But, my dear mother,” I replied, “if you will forgive me for saying so, I think you are a little premature. I have given you to understand that Miss Farquharson is the lady I hope to make my wife, but I have not said that I have any reason to believe she will accept me. As a matter of fact, I have not the vestige of a right to think she will. When all is said and done, I am only a country solicitor, and I don’t pretend to be anything more than a very ordinary sort of fellow.”

“Graham—Graham—if your dear father had heard you say that——”

“He would have known that I was only speaking the truth,” I replied. “I am sorry now that I mentioned the matter to you at all. It was foolish

of me to do so. If Miss Farquharson would so far honour me as to become my wife I should be the proudest man alive, but I have not the slightest reason to suppose that she will do so. I have only met her twice. However, you will see her on Monday, and will be able to judge of her merits for yourself."

"On Monday?" she cried in evident consternation. "Where am I to see her and why do you ask such a thing of me?"

I explained the situation.

She listened to all I had to say without comment. Then I finished my breakfast and departed to my office.

During the morning I drafted Mr. Farquharson's will and set one of my clerks to work engrossing it. As I read it for the last time I flattered myself it was a carefully-worded document and one that would hold good in any court of law, however strong the case for the other side might be. Then I returned home to find my mother still much perturbed in her mind. Of Monsieur Hippolyte D'Iberville I had neither seen nor heard anything.

If I were to tell you that Sunday passed without my giving any thought to Miss Christina I would certainly not be expressing the truth. To be plain with you, she was never out of my mind, nor for the matter of that did I wish her to be. Those

sweet grey eyes, that tender mouth, and the low and gentle voice had a fascination for me that I could not resist. It is possible that I may have been bewitched, but I am prepared to say, and with all truthfulness, that if I were I was by no means sorry for the fact.

You are now to contemplate my mother setting out in her carriage for "The Crag," clad in her best fur-lined mantle and best bonnet, a hot water tin at her feet, and old Mr. Farquharson's will stowed away in the innermost recesses of her pocket. I would have given a good deal to have accompanied her, but that was, of course, out of the question. I watched the carriage pass down the avenue and then made my way back to the house to await her return with what patience I could command. I had been careful to give my mother full instructions as to what she was to do with regard to the will, and I felt sure that I could depend upon her to carry the matter through as well as if I had done it myself. To those who have been similarly placed it will not be a matter for wonderment that I spent the time during which she was absent in a state bordering upon insanity. If I went down to the gate once I must have done so a dozen times, and how eagerly I scanned the road in the hope of descrying the returning carriage I must leave you to guess. I had almost

given up hope of ever seeing it again when the roll of wheels on the gravel warned me of its coming. Before old Hannah could reach the front door I had opened it and was hastening down the steps to give the old lady my arm and lead her into the house. Yet how strangely are we constituted! Impatient though I was to hear all she had to tell me, I found it impossible to put the question to her that was on the tip of my tongue.

"You have brought the will back, I hope, mother," I said, as if to gain time.

She immediately produced it, whereupon I placed it in a drawer of the *escritoire* and turned the key upon it. That done I returned once more to the fireplace and stood before it, waiting for her to speak. Even at the best of times women are apt to be women, and as such I presume they derive some sort of esoteric satisfaction from tantalising our sex.

"The road to 'The Crag' is terrible," observed my mother with delightful inconsequence.

"It really ought to be taken better care of," I answered with ill-concealed impatience.

"It certainly is the duty of the authorities to keep it in order," she continued. "At the foot of the long hill I positively trembled lest the horse should fall down."

A short silence ensued, during which I shifted from foot to foot.

"And now tell me about your interview with Mr. Farquharson," I said at last.

"I did not see him," she replied, and then, just when I hoped and believed that she was about to speak of Miss Christina, she added, "the will was brought to me by his granddaughter."

I suppose at this juncture the dear old soul must have come to the conclusion that she had teased me enough, for she beckoned me to her side upon the sofa, and placing her hand upon my arm, said; "Graham, you were right when you described her as a sweet girl. As you are aware, I am somewhat difficult to please, but in this case I am with you entirely, and what is more, if you want to know it, I think I can let you into a secret."

"And what may that secret be?" I asked.

She patted my hand affectionately.

"Well, if you want me to tell you, I think you have already stolen 'bonny Glenlyon away.'"

What I felt on hearing this I must leave to your imagination. Hitherto I had never been a believer in what is called love at first sight, but I have never said so since. It is strange indeed what small and at the same time unimportant circumstances have the power to alter the whole current of one's life.

On the morning that I went out to follow the hounds, as described in my first chapter, I had been sorely tempted, like the sluggard, to remain at home and in bed. Had I done so I should not have been upon the fell to rescue the one woman who is and has been all the world to me. It is true that in that case I should not have made the acquaintance of my estimable friends, the D'Ibervilles, nor should I have known old Mr. Farquharson. Whether I should have been better off on these two last counts I must leave it to your judgment to decide when you have read the extraordinary story I have to tell.

The following day being Tuesday it became necessary for me to attend a court meeting at Kendal. Before doing so, however, I took the precaution of placing Mr. Farquharson's will, as well as his authorization to act for Miss Christina, in the strong room in my office. During my career as a solicitor it goes without saying that some thousands of documents had passed through my hands, but I think I can confidently aver that none had ever caused me so much anxiety as these. It was not until I had seen them safely locked up that I felt easy in my mind. Then I rang my bell for my head clerk. When he made his appearance I bade him close the door.

"Williams," I said, "I shall not be back until

about four o'clock. While I am away I want you to be particularly careful about what strangers you admit to the office. I have very good reason for saying this. There is a dark skinned man——"

"A sort of half-caste, sir?" was his immediate reply, "with a squint in his left eye?"

"The very man," I cried. "You don't mean to say he has been here?"

"He was here twice yesterday afternoon to see you, sir, and he has been here again this morning. He said he would look back in the course of the day."

This was more than I had bargained for.

"He must not see me, Williams," I said. "I refuse to have anything whatsoever to do with him. I have told him that already. What excuse did he make for calling here?"

"He said he wanted to see you, sir, on important business. I told him that you were not in and asked if he could leave any message with me, but he declined to do so and went away saying that he would come back some time to-day."

"Then he will not see me," I answered, and there and then I set to work to furnish my faithful clerk with the facts of the case so far as I thought it was necessary for him to know them.

"If you will excuse me, sir, I must say I don't like the look of it at all," was his emphatic rejoinder

when I had finished. "Of course it is not for me to presume to offer you advice, but if ever I saw a hangdog look on a man's face I saw it on his. It is my belief there is not much that man would not do if he were hard put to it."

"I am exactly of your way of thinking, Williams," I replied. "And that is exactly why I don't want him to come hanging about here."

"I'll take good care that he does not," remarked Mr. Williams, with a ferocity I had never discovered in him before.

Ten minutes later I was on my way to Windermere Station and had practically forgotten for the time being that there was such a person in the world as Monsieur Hippolyte D'Iberville.

It was with considerable satisfaction that I learned on calling at the office *en route* from Kendal that the man I have just been discussing had not put in another appearance that day. On hearing that I began to hope that, if I had not actually seen the last of him, I had at least rendered him comparatively harmless. Looking at the matter from every point of view, I could not for the life of me see what mischief he could do me. And yet always at the back of my brain was the uneasy feeling that men of his stamp are not so easily silenced as some people might be inclined to

imagine. How correct my guess was you will presently discover.

It was with a peculiar feeling of apprehension as to what the day might bring forth that I woke next morning. In order that I might be at Windermere in time to meet the mysterious individual who was to bring me the document from the south, I had arranged to breakfast earlier than usual. That important meal disposed of, I set off for the station and reached it some ten minutes or so before the train was due to arrive. In compliance with my instructions I took up my position near the booking-office. As it transpired there had been a delay somewhere on the line, and in consequence I was compelled to possess my soul in patience for upwards of half an hour. At the end of that time the panting, hissing engine pulled up beside the platform and the passengers commenced to alight. As I saw them filing out a curious feeling of expectancy took possession of me. The episode had assumed such a strange proportion in my eyes that I was scarcely in a position to estimate it at its proper value. One by one the number of passengers thinned out and yet there was no sign of the man whose coming I was so anxiously awaiting. I was beginning to despair of seeing him at all, and was half thinking of leaving the station

when I became aware of a burly, broad-shouldered individual coming towards me. His hair was of that peculiar shade of redness which may be best described as being like brickdust, while his face was freckled as I don't remember ever to have seen another human countenance. His height must have been at least six feet, while his shoulders were broad in proportion. In his right hand he carried a heavy cudgel, and again, true to the description I had been given of him, a mackintosh was thrown over his left arm. As he approached me he came to a standstill and consulted his watch. From all appearances he might have been unaware of my presence. He looked about him as if he scarcely knew what to do next.

"I hope, sir, you will excuse me," he said, coming up to where I was standing, "but I suppose you couldn't tell me which way I should go from here to discover the residence of Mr. Carlingford?"

"I cannot say that I know the name," I remarked, bearing in mind the instructions I had received from old Mr. Farquharson. "I fancy, however, I can find someone within a short distance who will be in a position to direct you."

"You are really very kind," he returned. "If you will allow me I will avail myself of your offer. I am anxious to see him as soon as possible."

With that we passed out of the station together, and as we did so I took from the case of my watch the Nicaraguan stamp which Mr. Farquharson had given me to understand was to be an evidence of my *bona-fides*. This I presently handed to him, whereupon he looked at me and smiled.

"I am glad to find," he said, "that I have not made a mistake. My instructions are to deliver to you a packet, and I don't mind telling you in confidence that I shall be precious glad to be rid of it. How much you know and how much you don't I have of course no idea; but here is the letter, and, upon my word, I wish you joy of it."

"This does not sound very promising," I replied, as I stowed the letter away in an inside pocket of my coat.

I was beginning to find myself taking less and less interest in my undertaking. However, business is business, and when you come to think of it, that is about all that could be said of it. I had promised my client to do the work, and if only on the question of professional etiquette, to say nothing of other matters, I was in honour bound to do my best to bring it to a successful conclusion.

When we had walked perhaps fifty yards we came to a standstill.

"It appears to me as if there is nothing more for me to say to you," observed my companion,

who had evidently no inclination to stand upon ceremony.

"Upon my word I don't know that there is," I returned with equal abruptness. "So far as I can see we have each fulfilled our instructions."

Then an idea occurred to me, and though I had not the least hope of its proving successful, I determined to put the question to him.

"I don't even know your name," I said, "and in all probability it is unlikely that we shall ever meet again. I don't mind telling you, however, that you would put me under an enormous obligation if you could give me any sort of pointer concerning my client, that is to say, Mr. Farquharson?"

Either the man was a consummate actor, or I had been deceived in a way that falls to the lot of few men. At any rate, the fact is beyond question that he stared at me with a countenance upon which surprise was as plainly written as a schoolmaster's sum upon a blackboard.

"Farquharson? I don't know the name," he said, and there was a note of sincerity in his voice which convinced me that he was telling the truth.

"But the letter you have just handed me," I continued. "How do you account for that, since it was by his instructions that you brought it to

me? On my side I am here to meet you and take it from you."

"I cannot help that," he answered with a shake of his head. "To begin with, I am merely a paid agent in the affair. All I was told to do was to carry the letter from London to you, and with that ends my responsibility."

"But who sent you?" I asked, in the hope of entrapping him into a confession. He was not, however, to be caught napping.

"Fair and softly, my dear sir," he returned. "If you were in my place you would be as little likely to answer that question as I am. Between ourselves, I don't mind telling you that I have been well paid to come up here, and that being the case, you must see for yourself it is only right and proper that I should play fair by those who have played fair by me."

What to make of this curious assertion I did not know. How was I to judge whether he was telling me the truth or not? At first glance it seemed incomprehensible that he should have been employed on such an errand without having been made cognisant of what he was doing, or of the risk in which he might find himself involved. However, if he had made up his mind not to tell me what he knew I could not force him to do so,

and all my efforts would only be so much waste of time.

"It would have been a kindness on your part could you have helped me," I remarked. "But, as you do not feel disposed to do so, I cannot see that there is anything to be gained by prolonging this interview. With your permission, therefore, I will bid you good morning."

He looked at me out of the corner of his eye, and for a moment I thought that he would fall in with my suggestion. Apparently, however, prudence got the better of his willingness, and his lips remained sealed. Holding out his hand, he said in a matter of fact tone which was scarcely consistent with what I considered to be the importance of the situation, "It seems to me you are about right. I am sorry I can't oblige you, but I am not my own master, so far as this business is concerned. Again I must wish you good morning."

He turned and walked away, but a moment later he was back again.

"Look here, Mr. — whatever your name may be," he said, "I don't know how much you know about the folk you are dealing with, but I'll take my chance and give you a bit of advice. It may or may not be worth something to you."

"And that advice?"

"Is to keep your eyes open and your wits about

you. As they say in the States, you are dealing with a curious crowd, a remarkably curious crowd. You will doubtless find it out some day if you have not already. Again let me wish you good morning."

With that he retraced his steps towards the railway station, leaving me staring after him not knowing what to make of it all.

"It seems to me," I said to myself, as I resumed my walk, "as if I have run myself into a peck of troubles. I wonder what on earth the end of it all will be? It looks very much as if I am tumbling out of one mystery into another. Did that fellow really mean that he knew nothing of Mr. Farquharson, or was he merely playing a game of bluff?"

But as this was a question I was quite unable to answer, I came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to make my way back to my office and bestow my attentions on other and less exciting matters. Once there I placed the packet I had received in a box in my strong room, and having done so, rang the bell for my head clerk.

"I suppose, Williams," I said, "you have heard nothing more of that man concerning whom we were talking yesterday?"

"Well, sir, since you put it like that," he replied, "I must confess that I have not directly, so

to speak. It was young Tomkins who told me about him."

"Tomkins?" I cried, for Tomkins was one of my junior clerks. "What on earth has he had to do with the matter?"

"Well, sir, it appears it was this way. I had occasion this morning to send the lad down the street to Maker and Rolstone's office concerning the drafting of Danker's lease. He was on his way back when this Mr. D'Iberville met him and, I suppose, recognized him as one of your clerks. He began to question him as to whether you were at the office, and learning that you were not, wanted to know where you were and when you would return? The boy answered that he could not say, but that if he wished it he would return to the office and endeavour to find out. This, however, did not seem to fall in with Mr. D'Iberville's wishes. He said there was no need to worry about the matter, as he would probably be seeing you during the day."

"The deuce he did! And of course on his return he told you everything about it?"

"That was so, sir, and I at once forbade him to have anything to do with the individual in question. He promised that he would not do so. If you will excuse my saying so, sir, and it is a liberty I hardly like taking, I should feel inclined

to communicate with the police if I were in your place. I don't like the look of the man, and I have a notion that his motives are by no means as honourable as they might be."

"I am inclined to agree with you," I answered. "At the same time I think it would be better to keep our opinions to ourselves, at any rate for the present. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, and I have a lot of work to get through."

This was certainly the case, and from that moment until four o'clock, with the exception of half an hour for luncheon, I was kept almost continuously engaged.

It was quite dark when I got home, and the snow was falling fast. For some reason for which I cannot account I had a curious presentiment of coming trouble.

I entered the dear old home and found my mother, as usual, awaiting me at her tea-table. As I looked at her sweet face, framed in its grey curls, and—though it may seem wrong to make a jest of it—her cap decidedly awry, I thought I had never seen anything more peaceful or more home-like than the picture she presented. I have often heard it said that we men are apt not to appreciate our mothers at their proper value, but I have often wondered whether mothers realize the proper value of the happiness they derive from being really

appreciated by their sons. Be that as it may, I would not have changed my own mother for any other in the world.

In due course dinner was announced, and after my hard day's work I can assure you that I was quite in the humour to do ample justice to it. By the time I had finished my coffee and had smoked my cigarette all the gloomy fancies I had been indulging in throughout the day had vanished, and I was my own man once more. Two or three of Mendelssohn's lieder, played with the quaint old world touch of the early Victorian period, set the seal upon my contentment, and by the time the hall clock struck ten I had succeeded in convincing myself that I was just in the humour for bed. I rose and went to the bell, intending to ring for Hannah, but before I could reach it there was the sound of a vigorous knocking at the front door.

"Who on earth can it be at this time of night?" asked my mother, looking at me over her spectacles which, as usual, were perched on the end of her nose.

My thoughts instantly flew to the younger D'Iberville, and I determined that should he prove to be the culprit I would give him to understand once and for all that I would put up with no more nonsense of this description. A surprise, however, such as I had never contemplated was in store

for me. In less time than I could have counted a hundred old Hannah made her appearance in the drawing-room with a scared expression on her face.

"Master Graham," she said, in a voice but scarcely raised above a whisper, "there's a young lady of the name of Farquharson in the library as would like to speak with you."

In a minute I was on my feet. What could possibly have brought her to me at such an hour?

CHAPTER VIII

"MISS FARQUHARSON to see me at ten o'clock at night?" I said when old Hannah had left the drawing-room. "What on earth can it mean, mother? Something more than usually extraordinary must have occurred at 'The Crag' to account for such a late visit."

My mother, you may be sure, was as puzzled as I was.

"Go and find out, my boy," she said, being nothing if not practical. While you are interviewing her I will have some more coffee made. I expect the poor child will be very grateful for it."

I accordingly departed, leaving my mother to give the necessary instructions. The more I thought of it the more amazing the whole business seemed. I was at a complete loss to understand its meaning.

On entering the library I discovered Miss Christina standing before the fire, looking more like a ghost than a human being. Her beautiful

face was ashen pale, while there was a terrified look in her eyes that spoke for the mental agony she was undergoing. As I closed the door behind me she took a step forward, with a little exclamation that sounded to me like one of relief.

"Oh, Mr. Dennison," she began, and then without further ado broke down and commenced to sob as if her heart were breaking. The sight of her grief pierced me to the heart. I led her to a chair and seated her in it.

"Why, Miss Farquharson," I said, "what is the meaning of this? Calm yourself and try to tell me what is the matter. Take your own time about it, and rest assured that I will help you if it is in any way possible for me to do so."

In order to permit of her recovering her composure I pretended to busy myself with some papers on my writing-table, and when I looked round a few minutes later it was to find that she had to all intents and purposes become herself once more. I accordingly returned to the fireplace and seated myself opposite her.

"Now tell me what I can do for you," I said. "I hope your trouble is not very serious?"

Once more I thought she was going to break down, but she did not do so.

"Mr. Dennison," she said, "my poor grandfather is dead!"

"Dead!" I cried, springing from my chair in my astonishment. "Do you mean to tell me that Mr. Farquharson, your grandfather, is dead?"

"Heaven knows it is the truth," she replied. "He was found dead in bed by old Thomas at half-past eight this evening. I can scarcely believe it yet!"

Important though I realized her business with me must have been, I had by no means bargained for this. I found a difficulty in believing it.

"But he seemed well enough when last I saw him," I continued. "He looked as if he might have lived for another ten years. Have you any idea what he died of? Perhaps his heart was affected."

"No, Mr. Dennison," she answered very slowly and deliberately, as if she were making a statement the importance of which she fully realized. "My grandfather did not die from any natural cause. He was murdered."

"Good heavens," I ejaculated, and then added: "That is a very serious charge to make. May I beg of you to tell me what reason you have for believing such a thing?"

"Unhappily there is no room for doubt," she replied in a choking voice. "He was stabbed to the heart, and when old Thomas found him the bed was soaked with his blood."

She put up her hands to her eyes as if to shut out the recollection of the horrible sight she had witnessed. As for me, I sat staring at her, scarcely able to believe the evidence of my own ears. The suddenness of the whole thing was too terrible.

"But who can have committed this dreadful deed?" I asked, though in my own mind I felt no doubt that I could answer the question, not only to my own satisfaction but also to that of a judge and jury. She looked at me steadily for a moment or two and then shook her head.

"So far as I can see there is no way of discovering that at present," was her reply. "His bedroom window was shut but not fastened, so that it is quite possible his murderer might have entered by that way. The strange part of it all is that I was sitting sewing in the room below and heard nothing until old Thomas called for help. As a rule you can hear anything that goes on on the floor above."

"You have no suspicion as to the author of the crime, then?"

Once more she paused.

"Yes, I have my suspicions, but that is all," she said at length.

"You suspect one of those two men, the D'Ibervilles," I volunteered—"and so do I."

As I mentioned their name she gave a little shudder.

"I cannot help suspecting them," she replied. "They bore my poor old grandfather no good will, and for my own part I can only say that I live in constant terror of them. For a time after we made the discovery to-night I was so dreadfully upset that I could not do or think of anything. I seemed paralysed by the awful suddenness of the catastrophe. Then I summoned up all my energies and determined to come to you. Oh, do advise me, Mr. Dennison, as to what I am to do. I have no one else in the world to help me, for, of course, Mrs. Parsons and poor old Thomas, kind and willing as they may be, are practically useless in such an emergency. It was only this morning that my grandfather told me that, if ever anything should happen to him, I was to come to you at once. How little did either he or I imagine then that he had less than twelve hours to live. I can scarcely believe even now that it is not all part of some terrible dream from which I shall presently awaken. I suppose I ought to communicate with the police without delay, but I am so bewildered by the extent of my misfortune that I really do not know what to do or say."

I had made up my mind by this time. The sight of her grief would have melted a heart of

marble, to say nothing of that of a man who loved her, as I was convinced by this time that I did.

"I will tell you what you are going to do," I said, after I had turned it all over in my mind.

"You are going to leave it all in my hands, and you will stay here in my mother's charge, at any rate for the present. I will arrange everything with the police, and I will also go over to 'The Crag' and see about things there. One cannot be too careful in these matters. My mother will take every sort of care of you, while her sympathy will be more soothing to you, though not less sincere, than I have any right to hope that mine can be."

"How good you are to me," she said, her sweet eyes filling with tears.

"Not a bit of it," I answered with all-assumed cheerfulness. "I only wish that I could do more to help you. Now, if you excuse me for a moment, I will find my mother and bring her to you."

I rose and went towards the door. When I reached it I turned to her once more.

"By the way," I asked, "how did you come out here?"

"I walked," she answered.

"But surely not alone at such an hour? And your ankle scarcely recovered!"

"No! I brought Mrs. Parsons with me. She would not hear of my coming by myself."

"I should think not indeed; and, pray, where is that good woman now?"

"Outside, I suppose. I told her I felt sure you would not mind her sitting down in the hall while I saw you, but she said she preferred to remain on the steps. You cannot think what a comfort she has been to me to-night. Old Thomas was so upset that he was worse than useless, and what I should have done if she had not been there I cannot think."

"She must come in and go to the kitchen at once," I said. "I will tell her, and then bring my mother to you."

With that I made my way from the library to the front door, where I discovered the estimable woman complacently cooling her heels in the portico.

"Mrs. Parsons, this is a bad business which has brought you and your young lady here to-night," I remarked.

"Well may you say that, sir," she replied. "It's a terrible black affair right through, and I wouldn't have had it happen, no, not for worlds. It has upset Miss Christina something awful, poor dear; and to think of her wanting to come right over here to see you all by herself and at this time of the night! I told her that I wouldn't hear of

such a thing, so I put on my bonnet and came with her."

"A very proper proceeding on your part," I said, "and now you must come in and have some supper in the kitchen. I have arranged that Miss Farquharson shall stay here for the night, and it would be as well if you did so also. I shall be going over to the house after I have communicated with the police. By the way, I suppose you heard nothing that would give you any inkling as to how this crime was committed?"

"Nothing at all, sir; but then it isn't likely that I should, seeing that I was in the kitchen, which is such a long way from the poor old gentleman's bedroom."

I led her into the house and shut the door after her.

"It would be as well," I observed, "if you were to say nothing concerning what has happened to my servants. I have no doubt you can invent some excuse for coming here at such a late hour."

"You leave that to me, sir, and I will manage it," was her prompt reply. "They shall learn nothing from me."

With that I conducted her to the kitchen door and called to Hannah to see that she was provided with supper, after which I went to the drawing-room to break the sad news to my mother.

I found the old lady eagerly awaiting my coming.

"My dearest boy," she said, "you don't know how impatient I have been. Has Miss Farquharson gone, and what was the meaning of her curious visit?"

I made her acquainted with the details of the tragedy at "The Crag," and also of my hope that she would do her best to comfort the poor girl who was in such distress.

"You may be sure I will," she cried, with that sweet womanly tenderness that was her chief characteristic. "I will go to her at once. And, in the meantime, what will you do?"

"I must communicate with the police and then make my way to 'The Crag,'" I replied. "It is not a business I care at all about, but I must do it, if only for her sake. It will make a great stir in the county, and will scarcely enhance the reputation of that terrible old house. Go to her, mother, and do what you can, as I know you will, to help her in her hour of trouble."

I kissed her and she departed on her errand of mercy. As soon as she was gone I rang the bell for Hannah.

"Has Roberts gone to bed yet, do you know?" I enquired.

"I don't think he has, sir, but I can very soon

find out," answered Hannah. "Do you wish to see him, sir?"

"I want the dogcart round as soon as he can manage it," was my rejoinder.

By this time it was evident that Hannah was beyond being surprised by anything. With a muttered "Very good, sir," she left the room, though what constructions she must have placed upon my curious order was more than I could imagine; nor did I care to contemplate the effect my message would produce on my mother's pampered coachman, who had been in our service for upwards of ten years, and who had not been ordered out at such an hour more than half a dozen times during the whole of that period.

In the interval of waiting I would have given something to have gone to the library in order to discover how events were progressing there, but my common sense warned me that it would be better not to do so. When they were ready to see me I felt sure that they would come to the drawing-room, and until then I deemed it better to possess my soul in patience. As it turned out I had not long to wait, for within ten minutes of Hannah's departure the two ladies made their appearance. That Miss Christina had been crying was self-evident, and that my mother, doubtless by way of showing her sympathy, had also been indulging

in the same feminine luxury was equally apparent.

"I am going to put Christina to bed at once," observed the latter, and I could not but admire the tact which had prompted her to refer to the other by her Christian name.

The poor girl came forward with her hand outstretched. She raised her eyes timidly to mine and said with a voice that trembled with emotion : " Good night, and God bless you a thousand times for all that you have done for me."

At the risk of being considered unmanly I must confess that I experienced a choking feeling in my throat as I replied to her. With my poor powers of description I cannot hope to make you understand the pathos of the situation. A minute later and she was gone, with my dear old mother in close attendance upon her.

Having seen them depart I went to my study and filled a pipe. As I smoked it and waited for the roll of the dogcart wheels on the gravel outside I gave myself up to a consideration of the position. Never in all my professional career had I been brought face to face with such an extraordinary problem as was now presented to me. 'Classified under different headings it stood something like this :—First, I rescue a beautiful girl upon the fells and fall in love with her there and then. Secondly, I make the acquaintance of her vener-

able old grandfather and also of two of the most diabolical-looking ruffians it would be possible for mortal man to set eyes on. Thirdly, I am waited upon in my business capacity by the younger of the villains, who calmly proposes that I should assist him in his endeavour to recover a lost fortune, and at the same time to enable him to force an unwelcome marriage upon the very young lady to whom I have just referred. Fourthly, I am summoned in the middle of the night to take instructions for making the will of the old gentleman aforesaid, as well as to attend and receive a mysterious document at the hands of a still more mysterious stranger, under circumstances that were in full keeping with the extraordinary features of the case. Fifthly, I draw the will and in due course receive the papers. Sixthly and lastly, I receive the alarming intelligence that my curious client has been brutally murdered. A man in love, according to modern fiction, is proverbially supposed to be capable of almost anything, but I very much doubt if the most ardent Romeo had ever had such demands put upon him as I was being subjected to now. And yet, heaven knows, I was ready to do all that was asked of me—and more—for the sake of the poor lonely girl who had so strangely, as well as so suddenly, exerted such an influence upon my life.

I had just arrived at this conclusion when my ears caught the sound of wheels outside, and almost at the same instant my mother entered the room.

"She has gone to bed, poor child," she said, "and I cannot tell you, Graham, how sorry I am for her. This sad affair has naturally given her a terrible shock, and she seems to have derived the idea—how I cannot think—that she has not proved herself sufficiently grateful to you for what you have done and are doing for her."

"That is all nonsense," I answered. "Apart from all other considerations I should not be much of a man, and much less a credit to you and my father, if I did not do all that lay in my power to render her assistance in such trouble as she is experiencing at present. Now I must be off to see the police and then on to 'The Crag.' The dog-cart is at the door, and I expect your worthy Roberts is calling down all sorts of maledictions on my devoted head for daring to take him out at such an unholy hour."

"My poor boy, you will have a cold and cheerless drive," was her reply. "However, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are rendering a service to one who is practically incapable of helping herself."

When I had wrapped myself up in my thickest ulster and encased my hands in my warmest driving

gloves, I bade my mother good night and went out to where the cart, with its gleaming lamps, was awaiting me. Strange to say, the usually taciturn Roberts was in what was for him an extraordinary good humour. Possibly the novelty of the situation appealed to him; at any rate he did not venture upon any sort of expostulation; indeed, he even went so far as to refer to the brilliance of the stars and to predict that we were in for one of the sharpest frosts of the year.

Turning to the right and urging the good old horse to put his best foot foremost, I at length reached the police station, before which I drew up, not a little to the astonishment, I make no doubt, of my henchman, to whom I had not so far mentioned the object of my journey. Giving him the reins I descended from the trap and entered the building to find Sergeant Macleworth, whom I had known since I was a boy, in charge.

"Good evening, Mr. Dennison," said he, "it is not often that we see you here, and especially at this hour of the night. Nothing wrong, I hope, sir?"

"I am afraid there is something very much wrong," I replied. "I have come to tell you that I have just received news that a client of mine, a Mr. Farquharson, who has lately taken 'The

Crag' on the —— road, was murdered this evening between eight and nine o'clock."

The sergeant's face betrayed a curious combination of professional and citizenly horror. Happily murders in our district are not so common as to make one callous concerning them.

"You don't mean, sir, the old gentleman with the long grey hair, that I have seen walking along the road with a very pretty young lady, do you?"

"I am sorry to say I do," I replied, and went on to furnish him with a description of what had taken place.

"This will make a power of a fuss," he continued. "And you say these two dark coloured gentlemen are staying in the village. We shall have to look after them. If you'll pardon my saying so, sir, I think I had better call up the Inspector. He went to bed half an hour or so ago, and he ought to know of this at once. I won't keep you waiting any longer than I can help."

I bade him do whatever he thought proper and sat myself down in the Inspector's room to wait his return. Ten minutes or so later that important functionary made his appearance. He was as shocked as his subordinate had been at my news and stated his intention of at once setting off for the scene of the crime. I thereupon tendered him

a lift in my cart, which I assured him could easily carry a constable as well.

"If you will be good enough to give me five minutes or so to wrap myself up I'll accept your offer," he said. Then to the sergeant, he continued, "you had better tell Burrows to get ready at once to accompany me."

"Very good, sir," said the Sergeant, and the Inspector disappeared to prepare himself for the drive.

Once more I sat down to wait. Another ten minutes found us bowling along the high road in the direction of "The Crag." I drove, the Inspector sat beside me, while the policeman and Roberts occupied the seat behind. As we drove along we discussed the case in its different aspects. I had already informed the officer of the suspicions I entertained against the two D'Ibervilles. On the face of it, it seemed as if there could be no sort of doubt concerning their guilt, but my experience of the world has taught me never to trust too much to first impressions. I had heard what I believed, and what I still believe, to have been the sound of a ladder being taken away from the sill of the murdered man's window, and I had seen, as old Thomas had also done, the face of the younger of the two men gazing in at us as we talked together in the kitchen. But it would have been a dangerous

proceeding from a legal point of view to have attempted to prefer a charge of murder against them on such insufficient premises. That, however, I did not trouble myself very much about. It was a matter that could be safely left in the hands of the police and, for more reasons than one, I decided to do so.

After a drive that seemed interminable we at length reached the house. How cheerless it looked I cannot hope to make you understand. A faint streak of light percolated through the chinks of the shutters in the dining-room. Otherwise it was wrapped in total darkness.

"It is not what you would call a cheery sort of residence, sir, is it?" said the Inspector, as we descended from the dogcart. "You might almost be inclined to say that it fits in well with what has taken place here. It's been an unlucky house ever since I have known it, and that's a matter of a good many years. I can remember old Mr. Marden, the miser, who was said to have been murdered in it, as well as I can remember anything."

As he said this he gave a violent tug at the door bell. The peal that followed ought to have been heard half a mile away, for it was certainly loud and long enough. Several minutes went by and, as no notice appeared to be taken of our summons, recourse was had to the handle once more.

"The old butler is as deaf as a post," I said, "and, in addition to that, he is most probably asleep. We might ring all night and he would not hear us."

"I wonder if there is any other way by which we can get in," observed the Inspector, and I immediately bethought me of the kitchen window. It seemed like an act of sacrilege to break into the house of the dead, but this was no time to stand upon trifles. I mentioned the matter and in response to the Inspector's "Come along, sir, we can but try," I conducted him to the casement in question, the fastening of which he prised back with an ingenuity which would have done credit to the cleverest burglar he had ever arrested. Pushing up the sash, the three of us climbed in and, lighted by the constable's lantern, made our way in the direction of the hall. My experience of life had, up to that time, failed to render me familiar with death, save in its most peaceful form, and never shall I forget the feeling of awe which took possession of me as we made our way in Indian file down that dark and silent passage. The thought of the old man lying stark and cold in the room above was like a veritable nightmare to me.

"If I am not mistaken we shall find the butler asleep in the dining-room," said the Inspector.

"So far as I can see it is the only room in the house that has a light in it."

We accordingly proceeded to the apartment in question.

On opening the door we discovered a lamp burning on the table and old Thomas, as usual, fast asleep in an arm chair before the fire. It was evident that the terrible event which had occurred that evening had not affected his somnolescent capabilities. The Inspector crossed to him and shook him by the shoulder as I had done only a few nights before.

"Wake up, my man," he cried. "A nice sort of old fellow you are to make yourself comfortable with your master lying dead upstairs."

When at last he succeeded in rousing him, Thomas scrambled to his feet with an expression that was akin to terror upon his face.

"Lor' A'mighty," he said, "what do this mean?"

"You know very well what it means," shouted the Inspector, using his hand for a speaking trumpet. "I am a police officer, and I am here to investigate this case of murder. I shall have to find out what you know about it."

Poor old Thomas did his best to pull himself together, but it was a sorry fist he made of it.

"All I know, sir, is," he said, "that when I

went into my master's room this evening to take a look at his fire, and to ask if there was anything I could do for him before he settled down for the night, I found him lying upon his bed stabbed to the 'eart and with blood all over everything. I shook him and I called him by name, but I couldn't get no answer. You had only to look at him to see that he was stone dead. Dear—dear—I never thought I'd live to see this day. I've served him true and faithful these many and many a year, and now he's gone, and crotchety though he were at times, I'll never see his like again."

I patted the poor old fellow upon the back. His affection for his master had touched me more than I can say. The Inspector, however, was by no means so sympathetic.

"Take us to his room," he bellowed, "and I will put some questions to you afterwards. You've let no one into the house, I suppose, since your young mistress and the cook left it?"

"Not a soul, sir," the other answered. "As a matter of fact I don't know who there would be to let in, seeing how quiet we live. I had my bit of supper in the kitchen, even though other folk be a-dyin', and then came in here and sat down before the fire. I suppose I must have fallen asleep."

"I believe you," returned the Inspector with a roar. "If every butler slept like you, burglary

would be a paying concern. Now lead the way upstairs."

As he spoke he took the lamp from the table, and accompanied the old man from the room, the constable and I following close on their heels. Between ourselves I don't mind telling you that I was by no means looking forward to what I was about to be called upon to see. I could not but remember my last visit to the apartment in question. How little either of us had thought then what my next was destined to be.

Preceded by old Thomas, with his tottering footsteps, we ascended the stairs and made our way towards the door at the end of the corridor. With trembling fingers our guide turned the handle and, lighted by the Inspector, passed into the room. I am prepared to repeat, if the information is of any use to those who may have the misfortune ever to find themselves placed in a similar position, that I was as nervous as a hysterical school girl. It would have required but little persuasion on the Inspector's part to have induced me to remain in the passage outside. As, however, that persuasion was not forthcoming, I exerted all my will power and followed my companions.

I can remember the scene as perfectly as if it had happened only yesterday. I can see the dreary expanse of threadbare carpet, the time worn

furniture covered with faded chintz, and last, but by no means least, the great tester bed which contained—but let me pause: still holding the lamp aloft the Inspector approached it.

“Hullo!” he cried, as he looked at it. “What’s the meaning of this?”

Acting on a sudden impulse of curiosity I craned forward and peered over his shoulder.

Believe me or not, I assure you the bed was empty! *The body of the dead man was not there!*

CHAPTER IX

"Now look here," cried the Inspector, turning a threatening face on poor old Thomas, who stood cowering by the bedside. "What's the meaning of this? What has become of your master's body? If you don't answer me truthfully and at once I shall arrest you as an accessory to the murder. Speak up now, and don't let me have any prevarications, or it will be the worse for you. What have you done with it?"

But the old man was, for the time being at least, quite incapable of replying. His wits seemed to have entirely deserted him and he could only stand wringing his hands and staring at the blood-stained but empty bed, his breath coming and going in long gasps. And indeed it was enough to upset anyone. We had all come upstairs in the expectation of discovering the corpse of the murdered man stretched out upon the bed replete with ghastly details. To find it gone, therefore, was like a

farcical ending to a grisly tragedy—a totally unexpected and highly inartistic *denouement*. I can remember even now feeling a peculiar and inexplicable sense of disappointment myself, although, only a few moments before I would have given almost anything I possessed in the world to have been spared the nauseating experience. It was the Inspector, however, who appeared to be the most upset. He could not understand it, and because he could not he permitted his wrath to get the better of his judgment.

He glared at each of us in turn, after which he placed the lamp on the floor and knelt down and looked under the bed. There was nothing save fluff and dust to be seen there. He thereupon searched the capacious wardrobe, which might have held a dozen men, with the same result. He examined the window, and even went so far as to peer up the chimney, after which he turned, with the lamp still in his hand, and once more confronted poor, trembling Thomas.

"Now look here," he cried, "are you going to tell me what you have done with him, or are you not? You assured me downstairs that you have let no one into this house since Miss Farquharson and the cook left it. That window is latched, and yet the body has gone. You'd better make a clean breast of it and at once, or I promise you you'll

find yourself in queer street before you know where you are. You've got a tongue in your head, man, so speak up!"

By this time the poor old fellow had succeeded in pulling himself somewhat together, though he still seemed dazed.

"I don't know what I am to say to you, sir," he replied, his eyes fixed steadfastly upon the bed, as if he half expected to see his dead master reappear upon it. "As you yourself say I told you downstairs, I have let no one into the house. Miss Christina and the cook will bear me out that they saw him lying dead in this room here, and, what's more, there's the blood on the sheets to speak for itself. Do you think it would do me any good to get rid of 'im? It don't stand to reason that it would. I can't make 'ead nor tail of it—no, that I can't, try how I will."

That the old man was speaking the truth there could be no doubt. He was evidently as dumb-founded by this discovery as we were ourselves. One had only to look at his face to see so. Crotchety and surly though he may have been, he was not clever enough to act such a part—even had there been any reason for his doing so. Besides, look at it from any point of view, what had he to gain by such an act? Miss Christina and Mrs. Parsons would be in a position to swear to the fact

that the poor old gentleman had been murdered—what good, therefore, could he hope to achieve by making away with the remains? The same argument might be applied to the D'Ibervilles, even supposing they had managed to obtain an entrance to the house. To me the whole thing was inexplicable to a degree, and I said as much to the Inspector, who I could see was as much puzzled by it as I was—though, being an obstinate man, he was not prepared to admit it.

“It’s all very well, Mr. Dennison,” he replied, in answer to a remark of mine, “but it stands to reason that this man must know something about it. He saw the dead man lying here. • Miss Farquharson, the granddaughter, and Mrs. Parsons, the cook, did the same. Now, we all know that a dead man can’t get up and walk away. Yet the body’s gone! This man was the only living person in the house after they went to you, and yet he declares that, until we arrived, no one else came into it. With this evidence in front of me he asks me to believe that he knows nothing about the disappearance of the body. Why, to use his own expression, it doesn’t stand to reason. It’s absurd, to say the least of it. If we had found that window open I could have understood it; but as it was securely fastened on the inside, I must reject the theory that he was taken out that way. To

use a word with which you are familiar, sir, there's collusion somewhere, and I'd almost stake my professional reputation on the belief that this old man has had a hand in it, whatever he may say to the contrary."

Looked at from this point of view the case certainly did appear extremely suspicious, but I have not studied human countenances for nothing and, in my own mind, I was as morally convinced as I could be of anything that his argument was wrong. I would have been prepared to risk my life, as he said of his reputation, on the assertion that old Thomas was innocent of the charge the other imputed to him, and so, I felt sure, would Miss Christina, who, however rude he might at times have been to her, had nevertheless given me to understand that she thoroughly believed in his integrity as well as his love for his old master.

"Well, the only thing for it, so far as I can see, is for us to search the house and grounds," said the Inspector at last. "After that we must arrest those two—what did you say their name was?—ah! D'Iberville—thank you, sir—and endeavour to see if we can manage to fit them into the perpetration of the crime.

It was evident to me that my friend was far from being in the best of tempers. His manner had suddenly changed from the affable to the offensive,

and at any other time and under different circumstances I should certainly have taken him to task over it. As it was now, I had no desire to risk a scene which would have been as undignified as it might have been humiliating.

"Very well," I remarked, with a stiffness equaling if not exceeding his own, "let us search the house and grounds by all means. No one will be more pleased than I shall be when this mystery is cleared up."

With that we left the room, the Inspector carefully locking the door behind him and pocketing the key with an air that seemed to suggest that he was not quite sure that I did not know more about the matter than I professed to do. It was evident that my championship of old Thomas had to a considerable extent prejudiced him against me. Yet, why it should have done so I was naturally at a loss to imagine.

I can safely aver that there never was a house more carefully searched than was that ramshackle old building that night. We explored every room from the topmost garret to the lowest cellar, and, as you may guess, without finding any trace of what we were looking for. There were mice and black beetles by the hundred, an assortment of lumber that had evidently been accumulating for a number of years, and, strange to relate, in a large

cupboard in an attic, which I should say had not been used for a decade, an empty Egyptian mummy case—the painted face on the lid of which gazed at us, in the light of the Inspector's lamp, with a gravity that could only be the outcome of at least three thousand years. I have often thought since then that nothing could have been more incongruous, or, to say the least of it, more out of keeping with our search, than that strange relic of the long dead and forgotten past. Though afterwards I interested myself sufficiently in the matter to make enquiries concerning it, I was never able to discover how it had come to be in the house at all, and more especially why—since it must have possessed some value—it had been hidden away in the cupboard of a disused attic. Old Mr. Marden, eccentric though he was, would scarcely have been likely to invest his money in such a commodity, while I have since had Miss Christina's assurance that her grandfather was not even aware of its existence.

Having exhausted the house we repaired to the grounds, which we explored as well as we could by the light of the policeman's lantern. We examined the bed below the old gentleman's window, but could find nothing to satisfy our curiosity there; we overhauled the conifers on the lawn and on either side of the drive, but with equal un-

success. Meanwhile the Inspector's irritability was momentarily increasing. By mutual consent we had left old Thomas in the house. He could have been of no use to us outside, while his slowness would only have had the effect of delaying the work we were so anxious to accomplish quickly. At last, when we had reached the furthest boundary of the property our leader called a halt.

"It's no use going any further," he said. "We've done our best and we must wait for daylight. By the bye, Mr. Dennison, what about your coachman?"

"Good gracious," I cried. "In thinking of other things I had quite forgotten him. I wonder where he can be? We left him at the front door, but he is plainly not there now. I must go and look for him. He will not thank me for keeping him and his horse waiting so long in the cold."

So saying I hurried down the drive towards the entrance gate. I suppose I must have been some ten or twelve yards from it when a curious thing happened. Standing in the centre of the drive, as if he were waiting for me to approach him, I distinctly saw the figure of a man. He was tall and slim, but owing to the darkness it was impossible for me to see his face. So great was my astonishment that I came to a sudden standstill and stood staring at him. A moment later he had

disappeared into the shrubbery on the right, and I was running back to the house as fast as my legs would carry me. To my relief I discovered the Inspector and his man awaiting me on the front door steps.

"Quick!" I cried, scarcely able to speak for excitement. "There's a man in the shrubbery by the gate. I saw him distinctly only a few moments ago."

I had scarcely uttered the words before we were on our way down the drive in search of him. In my own mind I felt convinced that he must have been one of the D'Ibervilles, but, remembering the treatment my previous theory concerning old Thomas had been subjected to at my friend the Inspector's hands, I was not going to say so. Having pointed out the spot where I had seen him we set to work to explore the shrubbery, trying every bush and tree, but without success. Whoever the man was, he had evidently been frightened at seeing me and had disappeared. To attempt to find him now would be very much the same as looking for the needle in the proverbial bundle of hay.

"I suppose you are quite sure that you saw him, sir?" remarked the Inspector significantly, when we had once more returned to the gate.

"I am as sure of it as a man can well be of anything," I replied. "You surely don't suppose that I should have brought you down here on a fool's errand—do you?"

My tone must have given him some inkling of the state of my temper, for he at once apologised.

"I know how tricky things look in this darkness," he said. "I thought that just possibly you might have mistaken the shadow of a tree for a man. Such things have been known to happen."

"I saw the fellow as plainly as I can see you now," I replied warmly. "He was standing just there, and as soon as he saw me he turned away and bolted into the shrubbery. Let us look into the road; it is just possible my man is there and that he may have seen him."

We accordingly opened the gate and passed out into the road. Sure enough, there were the lights of the dogcart, gleaming through the darkness like a demon's eyes. I shouted to Roberts and he immediately drove up to where we were standing.

"Roberts," I said, "did you happen to see a man upon the road a few minutes since?"

"That I did, sir," was his immediate reply. He passed me running as if for his life. He climbed over yonder wall and went away across the

field. I made sure as you and the Inspector was after him, or maybe I'd have had a try to stop him myself. I don't know as ever I saw a man run like he did. A hill fox wouldn't ha' been in it with him."

"Well, it's evident that whoever he was he has managed to give us the slip," sighed my companion, to whom this incident was no more pleasing than the discovery he had made at the house had been. "Luck doesn't seem to be running my way to-night, and that's a fact!"

Turning to his subordinate, he bade him go back to the house and remain there until he should come to him again.

"What's more," he added, "you be sure to keep an eye on that old butler, and don't let him out of your sight. I am going down to the village to make inquiries about these D'Ibervilles. If they know anything of this business it will be strange if I don't have it out of them! And you, Mr. Dennison, what do you propose doing?"

"Well, it does not appear as if I can be of any further assistance to you here," I answered, "so I think I will be getting home. Should you want me for anything, you, of course, know where to find me, and I shall be at your service. You might let me hear if you discover anything. I need not tell you that Miss Farquharson will naturally be

anxious to know what has become of her grandfather's body."

"I will take care that you are communicated with at once," he returned, and I thereupon mounted to my seat in the dogcart and turned the horse's head in the direction of home. How glad I was to get there I must leave you to guess. It seemed like an eternity since I had left it.

"Good night, Roberts," I said, when I had descended from the cart. "I have kept you out very late, but the importance of the business I have had to do must be my excuse. As you may have gathered, a terrible murder has been committed at that old house, but if I were you, I should keep a silent tongue in my head, for the present at least, about it."

"Very good, sir," said the old man, touching his hat as he spoke. "This is a rare neighbourhood for gossiping, and it shan't be my fault if anything is said."

I watched the cart drive away to the stables and then let myself into the house with my latch key. It was nearly five o'clock by this time and I was fairly tired out, yet I would willingly have gone through it all again, if by doing so I could have done something to assuage the unhappiness of the poor girl upstairs. Treading softly in order that I might not wake up my household, I made my way

to my own room, and in something less than ten minutes was in bed and sound asleep. How long I should have slept I cannot say, but it seemed as if I had only just closed my eyes when I was awakened by a loud knocking at my door.

"What is it?" I cried, and in reply my mother's voice greeted me, asking if she might come in. Had it been anyone else who had disturbed me I believe I should have used strong language to express my feelings, but in her case it was different. She had brought me a cup of tea by way of a peace offering, I suppose, though I have my suspicions that curiosity to know what I had discovered at "The Crag" was also a factor not to be entirely ignored.

"Have you seen Miss Farquharson this morning?" I asked, as she seated herself by my bedside.

"I have only just left her. The poor girl has had a bad night, as could only be expected after all she has been through. I think, however, she seems a little more resigned this morning. We must do our best to cheer her up. And now tell me of your doings, dear lad. You must have gone through a strange and terrible experience at that wretched old house."

"A strange experience certainly," I answered, "but not so terrible as I had expected to find it."

"You surprise me," she cried. "Surely the

sight of a murdered man could not fail to be anything but horrible ! ”

“ I have no doubt it would have been had I seen it—but I did not ! ”

“ You didn’t go into the room ? ” she enquired, in a tone that suggested that she thought I had been afraid to do so.

“ Yes, I went into the room,” I remarked, and then resolved to tell her the whole story in order that, if necessary, she might in her turn tell it to Miss Christina. “ As a matter of fact I saw nothing horrible, and for the very sufficient reason that there was nothing to be seen—the body had disappeared.”

She gazed at me with amazement plainly depicted on her face.

“ Graham ! ” she cried. “ What do you mean ? ”

“ Exactly what I say, my dear mother,” I replied. “ I drove the inspector of police and a constable out to the house and found the old butler alone there and fast asleep. He conducted us to the room in which the tragedy had taken place, only to enable us to discover that the corpse was gone.”

“ But how could it have gone ? No one would have been likely to steal it, and besides, what reason would there be for doing so ? ”

As you may remember, this was exactly the question I had put to myself some hours before.

"We are all at a loss to understand it," I said. "It is one of the most mysterious affairs I have ever heard of. It may be unravelled in time, but I must confess that at present I cannot make head or tail of it."

"This will upset that poor girl more than ever," observed my mother. "Who is to break it to her?"

"I am afraid it will be necessary for you to do that," was my rejoinder. "Your tact will enable you to do it better than anyone else. If I were to attempt it I should in all probability bungle it. I know it must seem cowardly to ask so much of you, but for the life of me I can see no other way out of the difficulty. There are a number of reasons why she must be told, and at once. The police will have to hold an enquiry, the old man's death certified, and to enable her to live I must take immediate steps to prove his will."

"Very well, then. I must do what I can to help you."

She had scarcely said this before there was another knocking at the door, and in reply to my enquiry, Hannah's voice informed me that Williams, my managing clerk, was below and desired to see me on most important business at once.

This was most unusual, for in all the years that he had served my father and myself I had never known him to come to the house at such an early hour. Perhaps I should here explain that he and his wife lived over the office, and in a sense acted as caretakers of it.

"Show Mr. Williams in to the library," I cried. Give him a cup of coffee and tell him that I will dress as quickly as I can and come to him."

"Very probably he has heard some news concerning the crime at 'The Crag,'" said my mother, "and has come out at once to inform you. I will leave you now to dress, and will take care that breakfast is ready for you by the time you come downstairs."

She did so, and, still wondering what the man could want with me—for I was not prepared to accept her version—I plunged into my bath and afterwards set to work upon my toilet with all the speed I could command. In something less than a quarter of an hour I was ready to face not only the world but also Williams. I had but to give one glance at his face on entering the library to realize that, whatever the business was that had occasioned this early call, it was at least regarded by him as of vital importance.

"Well, Williams," I said, "this is very unusual. What is it that brings you here? I suppose you

have heard of the murder at 'The Crag,' and the police have been to you with a communication for me?"

"Murder at 'The Crag,'" he gasped, staring at me round-eyed. "Good heavens, sir, you don't mean to tell me that there's been murder committed out there?"

"I deeply regret having to say that I do," was my response to this question. "Poor old Mr. Farquharson, whose will we drew up the other day, was found by his manservant stabbed to the heart between half-past eight and nine o'clock last night."

Williams was as shocked as I expected he would be.

"These are terrible tidings, sir," he observed. "May I make so bold as to enquire whether the police have found any clue as to the identity of the assassin?"

"I am sorry to say they have not," I replied. "The whole affair is shrouded in mystery. And now, since you have not come here to see me about that, tell me what has brought you. I know you too well to believe that you would come unless you had a good and sufficient reason."

"And you would be quite right, sir," he rejoined, but with an air that led me to suppose he was endeavouring to postpone an evil moment.

"The business which has brought me to you so early is of a very serious nature. I only hope that when you have heard it you will not think I was an accomplice in the matter."

"If it is anything dishonourable you may rest assured that I shall not think so," I replied. "You have been too good a friend and servant to my father and myself for me ever to entertain any doubt concerning your integrity. But we are not advancing matters very much by talking in this way. I have still to learn what has happened."

"Well, sir, it's like this," the worthy fellow observed with what was almost a sob in his voice. "Last night my wife and I went out to spend the evening with some friends, and I take blame to myself when I say that we were somewhat later than usual in returning home. In consequence we both overslept ourselves, which I can assure you, sir, is a thing I very seldom do."

"Come, come, my good Williams," I interrupted impatiently, "for goodness sake get on with your story, whatever it is. You are not going to tell me, I hope, that the office has been burnt down?"

The poor fellow looked at me with a face that was like that of a lost spirit. At any other time it would have been laughable enough, but just then I was not in the humour for merriment.

"It's worse than that, sir," he continued, "ever so much worse, and it has upset both my wife and myself more than you can imagine."

At this point I am afraid my temper gave way.

"Is it quite hopeless," I cried, "to attempt to make you tell your story without all this circumlocution? Speak out, man, and let me know the worst and be done with it."

"Well, sir, to be plain with you, a burglary has been committed at the office; at least I have every reason to be afraid so."

"A burglary?" I answered, without realizing the importance of his words. "I presume you mean that that careless office boy has embezzled the petty cash?"

"It's worse than that," he repeated lugubriously. "You know me well enough, sir, to be sure that I should not worry you about such a trumpery matter. To my shame I have to confess to you that while Mrs. Williams and I were asleep last night the office was entered and the safe forced."

"Good heavens!" I cried in alarm, as the magnitude of the affair began to dawn upon me. "Do you know if anything of value was taken?"

"No, sir," he replied; "I made no sort of examination. I sent for a policeman at once on making the discovery, and then thought it best to come on

and tell you. Oh, sir, I cannot say what a shock it has been to me and my poor wife. I could not touch a mouthful of food, but came here as fast as I could."

"My good fellow," I said, "I do not see that you are to blame. You have a perfect right to go out in the evening if you want to. And, as you did not hear the rascal, or rascals, at work, that was surely a matter of accident, not of design. By the way, how was the safe opened?"

"The lock was picked, sir, and the policeman says that the man who did it must have been one in a thousand, for, so far as I can tell, there has been no great amount of damage done."

A hundred thoughts were flashing through my mind while he was talking. It began to look as if there were more in this case than was at first apparent. What if the D'Ibervilles, having murdered old Mr. Farquharson and not having been able to discover the document they wanted, had made their way to my office and forced the safe in the hope of obtaining it. In that case I should find myself placed in a more than awkward position.

"Return to the office at once," I said, "and I will join you there as soon as possible. Make quite sure that no one goes near the safe until I arrive,

after which we will go through what it contains together and see if anything is missing."

He rose to leave me, but before doing so he paused to thank me in a manly way for my treatment of him. Poor fellow, it had been a great shock to him, and one from which I knew it would take him some time to recover.

When he had left the house I joined my mother in the dining-room, where I found her busily engaged making tea. I looked round the room for Miss Christina, but could see no sign of her. My mother guessed what was passing in my mind.

"I have induced her to breakfast in her room," she said. "Though she was anxious to do so, I did not consider her fit to come downstairs. The news I gave her has upset her terribly, poor child. But tell me what it was that brought Williams out here so early."

I told her, and she stared at me as if she could not believe that she had heard aright.

"A burglary at the office?" she gasped. "My dear boy, what does it mean?"

"That is what I want to find out," I replied, as I took my seat at the table and unfolded my serviette. "It seems to me I only jump out of one trouble to fall into another."

"Never mind, my dear," she said, as she came

round and kissed me. "Keep up a stout heart. All will come right in the end. As your father used to say, 'It is the worries of life that prove the value of the man.'"

At that moment I must confess that I did not feel sufficiently philosophical to appreciate her reasoning, but I did not say so. Having finished my breakfast—if breakfast it could be called, for I scarcely ate anything—I set off for the office. There I found Williams seated before the strong room door and anxiously awaiting my coming. A stolid country policeman had taken up a position opposite him. I sent the latter about his business, and then, turning to my head clerk, said:

"Now, before we do anything else, let us take an inventory of the contents of the safe."

Deed box after deed box was tried and found to be securely locked. No attempt had evidently been made to tamper with them. It was only when I came to my own, on which my name was printed in white paint, that my suspicions began to be confirmed.

"The lock of this box has been forced," I said, and my heart began to beat wildly, as I realized what the next few minutes might bring forth.

Throwing up the lid I set to work to examine the documents it contained. A very short search was

sufficient to convince me that what I feared had taken place. Mr. Farquharson's precious document, which had been handed to me by the mysterious messenger from the south, was missing! The object of the burglary was at once explained.

CHAPTER X

FOR some minutes after I realized that the precious packet which had been entrusted to my care by old Mr. Farquharson had been stolen from my strong room, I was like a man dazed. I did not know what to say, think, or do. Never in my life before had I lost or mislaid any document belonging to a client, much less one so important as I had every reason to suppose this to be. I could only stare at the array of tin boxes on the shelves as if I hoped that they might be able to throw some light upon the subject. Little by little, however, my power of reasoning returned to me, and I was once more able to think connectedly. That the D'Ibervilles had stolen the packet, as they had done the old man's body, I had not the shadow of a doubt. There was also another point which, admitted of no question. In allowing them to obtain possession of the papers I had destroyed all chance of

Miss Christina inheriting her grandfather's fortune. For all I knew to the contrary, she might be thrown penniless upon the world, and, in a measure, through my fault. How devoutly I wished that I had adopted the old man's first suggestion and have placed the packet in the safe keeping of my bank, and yet I had thought I was acting for the best in putting it in my own strong room. However, it was no use my saying what I wished I had done; what I had now to do was to make an effort to recover the property before it would be possible for those scoundrels to realize on it. But, so far as I could see, that was likely to prove an exceedingly difficult business. Ever since I had replaced the books and deeds in the deed box Williams had been closely watching me. He must have realized, from the look of consternation on my face, that I had sustained some serious loss.

"I hope the thief, sir, has not taken anything of great value?" he said at last.

"I regret to say he has," I replied, knowing that I could trust him with my secret. "A document of old Mr. Farquharson's of 'The Crag' has gone."

"Good heavens, sir, you don't say so," was his horrified reply. "Who on earth can the thief have been?"

"That is just what we have got to find out. I

don't mind telling you in confidence that I suspect those men, the D'Ibervilles, of whom I spoke to you the day before yesterday. They have been trying for years to obtain the information which that packet contained, but without success. If they murdered that poor old gentleman they must have come on here afterwards. But why did they steal his body?"

"Steal his body, sir?" gasped Williams. "You don't mean to say the body is missing?"

"It has not been found yet, but——" (here I dashed out of the safe and slammed the door to behind me) "I see it all," I cried. "I must let the police know of this, and at once. Will this door lock now?"

"I cannot say, sir," was my clerk's astonished reply. "But the handle seems to turn all right."

Before he had finished speaking I had whipped out my keys and had locked it. It was evident that the man who had committed the burglary had known his work, for he had managed to open the safe without injuring its mechanism. Why he had not locked it again after him, and so have put us off the scent, at least for a time, I could only attribute to the fact that he had been disturbed.

"Now I am going to the police station, Williams," I said. "I may be absent for some time, but you can look after affairs while I am away."

So saying, I left the office and set off to interview the authorities. As it happened I was just lucky enough to catch the Inspector as he drove up in his cart.

"Good morning, Mr. Dennison," he said, and from the way in which he said it I gathered that he was still out of temper about something.

"Can you spare me a few minutes?" I asked, and upon his replying in the affirmative, I followed him into the station and to his own room. "Have you any news for me?" I asked.

"None at all," he answered. "Though we have scoured the country, and I still have men out in every direction, we cannot find either the D'Ibervilles or the body of the murdered man. All three seem to have vanished into space. That is all I can tell you. I am sorry it is not more satisfactory."

"Now listen to what I have to tell you," I remarked in my turn. "As I informed you last night, these two men have been following Mr. Farquharson about the world for a long time in the hope of being able to extort from him information concerning a certain large sum of money which they declare he has wrongfully appropriated. They tracked him from New Orleans to Cape Town, from Cape Town to Italy, thence to Spain, afterwards to London, and from London here. He informed

me that they had sworn they would kill him if he did not divulge his secret, but he was an obstinate old fellow and resolutely declined to do so. Last night he was murdered."

"I know all about that," said the Inspector, stabbing his blotting pad with his pen as he spoke. "What is the use of going over it again?"

"Because there is more to come," I returned. "I drew the old man's will, and at his request I took possession of a certain packet containing documents relating to the fortune to which I have referred."

"Well?"

"I locked the packet up in my strong room at the office yesterday morning. In the evening Mr. Farquharson was murdered, as we all know, between half-past eight and nine o'clock. Now here comes the important part of the affair. Between midnight and seven o'clock this morning my office was broken into, my safe opened, my private deed box forced and the packet stolen."

"Good Lord," he cried, "this puts altogether a new complexion on the mystery." Then after a pause he said, "But if they knew that you had the documents why did they commit the murder?"

"I thought that you would ask that question, and I fancy I can answer it. They didn't know that I had them until they forced their presence on him.

To save his life he must have confessed where they were, but he did not realize what remorseless wretches they were. To prevent his stopping them, or of communicating with me, they murdered him. Then they hastened on to my office and rifled the safe."

"You put it very well," he answered, "but there are two questions I should like to ask you. They strike me as being important. In the first place, if they murdered him why did they make away with the body?"

"Of course my supposition may be a wrong one," I returned, "but the construction I place upon it is that they were not certain of being able to find the papers at my office, and that they intended, in some clever way of their own, to blackmail the granddaughter into instructing me to give them up."

"Upon my word, I believe you have hit the nail upon the head," he was good enough to remark. "At any rate, the idea seems logical enough. If only we could lay our hands on them!"

"Could you obtain no information concerning them at the cottage in the village?"

"Only that they had left that evening about eight o'clock and had not returned. Their traps were

still in their rooms, but there was nothing to be learnt from them. Who could the man have been, do you think, who you saw in the garden of 'The Crag?'"

"The younger of the pair," I should say.

"But how does that fit in with your theory? It was as near as possible four o'clock when you saw him. In which case the burglary at your office, allowing for the time it would take him to walk the distance, would not have taken place until nearly six, a very unlikely hour for such a deed to be committed. It is scarcely probable that they would have returned to the house after having perpetrated it."

I was obliged to confess the force of his argument, though I still felt quite certain in my own mind that it was the younger of the two dusky men I had seen.

The Inspector having promised to look into the matter of the burglary and to let me know at once should he hear anything concerning the tragedy we were both doing our best to investigate, I left the police station and returned to my office, sorely perturbed in my mind. What to do I could not tell. Knowing nothing of what was in the packet I was practically powerless to render Miss Christina any assistance in the recovery of her legacy. If

we could succeed in getting hold of the two men for whom the police were so diligently searching, it was just possible that we might force them to surrender the booty, which I did not for a moment believe to be their property. But though the police all over England were by this time on the look out for them, there appeared to be no immediate prospect of running them to earth. Then an idea occurred to me, and I wondered that I had not thought of it before. Seating myself in my office chair, I wrote the following advertisement:—

“ If the person who on Wednesday last delivered a sealed packet to some one at Windermere railway station will communicate with G. Dennison, solicitor, of Cudthorpe House, near Ambleside, he will be well rewarded.”

Of this I caused a dozen copies to be made and despatched them for insertion in the principal London newspapers. That done, I paused to consider what I should do next. That I was not fit to transact any ordinary business I was only too well aware, and, for the matter of that, I had nothing of any real importance that called for my consideration that day. There was, however, one

thing which I knew should not be delayed, and that was to break the news to Miss Christina. Needless to say, I did not look forward with any degree of pleasure to doing so. No man, I presume, likes to confess that he has made a mistake. How much less does he care to do so to the woman he loves, particularly when that confession is to the effect that he has deprived her, unintentionally it is true, of her fortune. However, it had to be done, and done I was determined it should be, whatever the cost might be to myself. I rang my bell for my head clerk.

"Williams," I said, "this business has very much upset me. I feel that it is my duty to go home and break the news to Miss Farquharson. I shall in all probability not return to the office to-day. Should any communication come to me from the police, or anything of importance transpire, send a clerk over to the house with a note."

"Very good, sir."

With a heavy weight upon my heart I put on my hat and coat and set off for home. The air was brisk and fresh, and there was the rime of frost on the trees and hedges, but I was by no means in the humour to appreciate it. I was thinking of the interview that lay before me, and of the pain I was about to add to the heavy load which

the sweet girl was already carrying. It would be small wonder indeed, I argued, if she were to hate the sight of me after this. That I paid her a poor compliment I can tell now, but at that time I was too cast down to be able to see anything in a proper light. For the first, and so far the only time in my life, I was sorry to enter the gates of the dear old home. With laggard footsteps I made my way up the drive and let myself in at the front door. The sound of voices reached me from the drawing-room, and one of them, which had hitherto been like sweetest music in my ears, now fell upon them like notes of grave reproach. I went into my study and rang the bell. When it was answered by Hannah I told her to go to my mother and ask her if she could see me in the study for a few minutes.

Upon the old lady making her appearance I told her that I wanted to see Miss Christina alone.

"You will find her in the drawing-room," she answered. "I hope you have not more bad news for her?"

"I am sorry to say I have," I replied. "The burglary last night has resulted in some important papers of her grandfather's being stolen. I think it only right she should know it at once."

"Then go to her, dear lad!" and I accordingly went.

Of what happened during that interview I do not intend to say very much. I told my story, and she listened with grave attention. When I had finished a silence descended upon us both.

"Can you ever forgive me?" I asked, fearing that my case was beyond all hope.

"Mr. Dennison," she replied, "you don't surely suppose that I mind the loss of the money, even supposing I should ever have received it. I am sorry for you, who have been so good and kind to me. I am sure you did all you could in the matter, and why you should consider it your fault that it has been stolen I cannot think. I have been accustomed to poverty all my life, and I am not afraid of it. If you will promise me not to reproach yourself, I, on my side, will give you my word not to think any more about it."

"You are generous beyond measure," said I, "but I shall always blame myself. However, there is still the chance of my being able to get them back again, and you may be sure that I will spare no effort to do so."

She held out her little hand to me in the frank way that I had come to know so well.

"You won't let this miserable matter interfere with our friendship, will you?" she said.

"I value that more than you can imagine," was

my rejoinder, and wondered whether I had said too much.

Another week went by, and to our amazement, no trace was discovered of either of the D'Ibervilles, the body of the murdered man, or any clue as to the perpetrator or perpetrators of the robbery at my office. Almost daily I visited the police station, but with the same result—they could not tell me anything. Though I had never entertained much hope of doing so, I received no answers in reply to the advertisements I had inserted in the newspapers. Whoever the man was who had brought the packet, he had either not seen them or was determined not to reveal his identity.

When a month had elapsed I had begun to give up all hope of finding the documents again. As for Miss Christina, she still remained with us, though she had protested over and over again that she must not trespass to such an extent upon our hospitality. She seemed to feel the non-recovery of her grandfather's remains a great deal more than the loss of her prospective fortune. Even the reward offered failed to produce any tidings, though, as is always the way in such cases, we were over and over again made the recipients of more or less bogus information. At one time the body was declared to have been found on the fell

side, on another it had been discovered in a deserted quarry, later a boatman had come across it floating among the reeds of the lake. Men and women declared that they had seen what looked like the body of a man being carried along a lonely road near "The Crag" on the night of the murder, while there were not wanting others who solemnly averred that he had been secretly buried by the murderer in the garden of the house where he met his tragic end. Needless to say, these rumours, without foundation though they might be, were sufficient to cause Miss Christina the deepest pain. It was in vain that my mother and I endeavoured by every means in our power to keep them from her; somehow or another they invariably managed to reach her ears.

While all this was going on I found myself growing more and more madly in love with her. Indeed, as my mother was constrained to admit—for at times I fancy the poor old soul felt a little jealous of her influence over me—it was impossible to be anything but in love with her. Her beautiful face, sad though it almost always was now, and her sweet, gentle disposition, would have captivated the heart of the veriest stoic that ever breathed. On her side her affection for my mother was a pretty sight to watch, and a source of endless

pleasure to me. She did her best to anticipate the old lady's every want, and was never tired of waiting upon her. She even managed by some inscrutable charm to captivate the affections of that usually adamant person, the venerable Hannah, who at first had been decidedly inclined to resent her appearance in our domestic circle. Mrs. Parsons, I should here record, had found another situation in the neighbourhood, while old Thomas, who had put by money during his service with Mr. Farquharson, departed to take up his abode with some relations, whom he had not seen for upwards of thirty years, in the South of England. From that moment to this I have neither seen nor heard anything of him. He has probably been gathered to his forefathers long since.

And now I have to put on record a curious coincidence, one of the most curious that has ever occurred in my experience. Nearly three months had elapsed since the tragedy at "The Crag," and the excitement which it had caused had almost been forgotten, save by those who were directly interested in it. Mr. Farquharson's body had not been discovered, the D'Ibervilles had not been traced, and I had heard nothing either of the mysterious individual who had handed me the packet, or the documents themselves. I was in the throes of a big law suit over a property for which I acted

as solicitor, and it kept me busier than I had been for a considerable time past, necessitating as it did much rushing about the country in the keeping of appointments with all sorts and conditions of men, from peers of the realm and eminent barristers down to humble farm labourers.

One day a telegram arrived urgently requesting my presence in London the following afternoon to discuss with counsel an important new development which threatened to prove prejudicial to our case. Little as I desired to leave home just then, I was compelled to go, and leaving my business in charge of Williams, I had my bag packed and set off by the night mail. It is a long and wearisome journey, and it was with no small relief that I found myself at last at my destination. My appointment was not until three o'clock, but I found plenty of ways of occupying myself in the meantime. It is not difficult to while away the hours in London.

Being in the neighbourhood of Oxford Street about one o'clock, I determined to lunch at the Holborn Restaurant, and accordingly made my way to the grill room of that famous hostelry. Having given my orders I looked about me. After the quiet little inn at which I usually lunched at home the crowd possessed a curious fascination for me.

I looked from table to table, studying the various faces, and then suddenly uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise.

Seated alone at a table some few yards distant was the man who had brought Mr. Farquharson's packet to Windermere, and for whom I had advertised in the various London papers!

CHAPTER XI

STRANGE indeed are the workings of fate, and curious beyond belief are sometimes the apparently trivial circumstances which lead up to the most momentous events of our lives. In the last chapter I described the curious coincidence that brought me face to face in the Holborn Restaurant with the very man who had conveyed me the packet of documents which had been stolen from the strong room of my office. I had no sooner set eyes upon him than all the regret I had hitherto felt at having been summoned to London immediately vanished. I had advertised and advertised, but to no purpose. Not a trace of him had I been able to discover, yet the mere fact that I had come west to pay a call in Bloomsbury and had not found my friend in his office, and had thereupon decided to lunch at the Holborn, had brought me in contact with the very person whom I had so long been anxious to

get into communication with, and whom I had almost come to believe had never had any real existence.

Observing that he had finished his lunch and was preparing for departure, I rose, tilted my chair, and without more ado went across to the table at which he was seated. Whether he had recognized me or not up to that moment I cannot say, but when I accosted him he showed no sign of being surprised. In fact, he looked up at me as he would at a perfect stranger.

"Good day," I said. "I wonder if you remember me?"

"I remember you perfectly," he answered. "I met you at Windermere station some three months ago."

"Precisely," I continued, not without a feeling of wonderment at his coolness. "You may also have noticed that I have been advertising for you in a number of London papers?"

"Yes, as you say, I have noticed that also. You must have wasted a good deal of money on them."

"It seems only too evident that I did. But why did you not reply, since you admit that you saw them? I had hoped you would have done so, for it meant a great deal to me, more perhaps than you can imagine."

"Why should I have replied?" was the calm

question he put to me as I seated myself beside him.

“ Because you brought the letter to me ? ”

“ I admit it, and I was well paid for doing so. But I don't see that that affects the present issue. Now, what is it you want with me ? ”

“ Would you as a special favour tell me who sent you to me ? I am prepared to pay a good price for the information, which, as I said just now, is of vital importance to me. ”

He steadily contemplated my face for upwards of a minute. It was plain I had offended him.

“ I do not take bribes to reveal information which my employers do not wish to have known, ” he said.

“ Then I am to understand that it is useless for me to attempt to obtain it from you ? ” I asked.

“ Quite useless ! I should deserve to have no further business entrusted to me if I were to do such a thing. As a solicitor you must surely see that. I carried out my instructions, that is sufficient. Under similar circumstances I feel certain you would have done the same. ”

The force of his reasoning was incontestable, and I had to admit it to myself ; nevertheless, I will own to feeling grievously disappointed at his refusal to help me.

“ In that case I am sorry to have disturbed you, ” I said at last, feeling that our interview was coming

to an end. "Should you at any time see your way to doing what I want I should be vastly grateful to you. You have my address, I think?"

"I have it in my pocket book at this moment," he gravely remarked. "I will communicate with my clients in the course of the next few days, and should they consent to my doing what you wish, I will acquaint you of the fact. If you hear from me by Saturday next you will know that they agree; if you do not, you will perhaps take my silence, as the theatrical managers' advertisements say, in the light of a polite negative."

With this meagre assurance I was compelled to be content, so I thanked him and returned to my own table, upon which the waiter had just placed my meal. Then a notion suddenly occurred to me, and turning to him I asked him if he could tell me the name of the individual whom I had just left.

"I can't tell you myself, sir," he replied, "but I'll ask one of the older waiters and endeavour to find out. I've only been on the staff a few days, and am not very familiar with the customers yet."

"If you can do so I should be very much obliged to you," I answered, and commenced my lunch while he went off to consult a grey-haired *confrere* further down the room. My mysterious gentleman had by this time paid his bill, and was now putting

on his overcoat preparatory to leaving. His freckled face and flaming beard recalled old Mr. Farquharson's description of him in a most unpleasantly suggestive fashion. As I watched him that scene in the shabbily-furnished bedroom rose before my mind's eye with every detail clearly outlined.

Having donned his hat and taken up the identical cudgel he had carried on that other momentous occasion, he went slowly down the aisle between the tables and disappeared through the glass doors at the further end. It was at this moment that my waiter returned to me.

"I have found out, sir, that his name is Saunders, and that he was for many years in a solicitor's office—Messrs. Franceleigh and Somerset, of Lincoln's Inn. He left them about a year ago to start an agency business on his own account, but nobody seems to know where his office is. I'm afraid that is all I can find out about him, sir."

"You have told me just what I wanted to know," I answered, and not being anxious to let the man suppose that I was too curious, I added, "I met him in the country quite casually some months ago, but never properly caught his name."

"It's sometimes difficult to catch strangers' names," replied the waiter with the air of an oracle.

"I've found it so myself. It sort of slips in at one ear and out of the other. Your bill, sir; yes, sir!"

While he was gone for the change I made a note in my pocket book of the facts I had gathered from him, for having so much to think of I did not feel disposed to rely altogether upon my memory, good as it usually is. I paid my bill, tipped the waiter, and left the restaurant firmly resolved upon one thing, and that was to pay a visit to the office of Mr. Saunders' late employers and interview them. A brisk walk brought me to Lincoln's Inn, and after some little hunting about I discovered the place of business of that eminently respectable firm. Only the junior partner, it appeared, was at home, and after a wait of some five minutes I was ushered into his august presence. He proved to be a middle-aged gentleman, and resembled the conventional stage solicitor both in appearance and manner. He invited me to be seated, and then wheeled his chair round to face me.

"Mr. Dennison," he observed, glancing at my card, which he had placed upon his desk, "pray, what can I do for you?"

"I believe that until a short time ago you had in your employ a man of the name of Saunders, who has left you, but who even now occasionally does odd jobs for you?"

Mr. Somerset gravely bowed his head.

"What you say is quite correct," he answered. "The person you refer to was with us for many years, and left of his own free will to start business on his own account. I shall be very pleased to vouch for his character, if that is what you mean."

"I have not come to make enquiries concerning his integrity," I went on. "I believe you sent him about three months ago up to Westmoreland with a packet for me, presumably from a client of yours, an old gentleman named Farquharson, since deceased."

"I cannot for the moment recall the name," he answered, "but, if you will allow me, I will enquire of my head clerk."

In response to the summons of the bell that gentleman made his appearance. Like his employer, he was the essence of respectability.

"Judson," said Mr. Somerset, sitting back in his chair and placing his finger tips together, "have we among our clients a gentleman of the name of Farquharson?" Then turning to me—"that was, I think, the name you mentioned?"

I bowed. If he could assume a manner, so could I.

The clerk considered for a moment before he replied.

"No, sir; I am quite sure we have not. I can-

not remember having heard the name before in connection with the firm."

It began to look very much as if I were destined to be disappointed again.

"But you sent this man Saunders up to Windermere to me with a sealed packet," I protested, "the property of the gentleman whose name I have mentioned. That was three months ago."

"Ah! I recall the circumstance now that you mention it. We *did* send him, but the owner of the packet was not a Mr. Farquharson."

"What?" I cried, quite unable to conceal my astonishment, "not Mr. Farquharson? Then who on earth was he?"

"I am sorry to say that is a question I cannot answer," was his quiet rejoinder. "It would not be professional to do so, seeing that we had strict injunctions at the time not to divulge it."

I began to think that, after all, there was a little too much secrecy in our profession.

"But I can assure you, sir," I went on, "that I was instructed by Mr. Farquharson, who lived in my neighbourhood, to meet the messenger under extremely peculiar circumstances. I did so, and the packet was handed to me. It has since been stolen, and, as you may have heard, Mr. Farquharson has been murdered."

"But, my good sir, you must really be mistaken," answered Mr. Somerset. "I have the best of reasons for knowing that our client, to whom the packet belongs, is alive at this moment, and, so far as I can judge from his letters, in the best of health."

The case was getting so bewildering that I could make neither head nor tail of it.

"I tell you, sir, that the precautions taken to insure the matter in question reaching my hands were so explicit that there could have been no mistake."

"That is a question I am not in a position to discuss with you," observed Mr. Somerset. "We carried out our instructions, and there, so far as we are concerned, the matter ended."

I saw there was nothing more to be got out of him, so I thanked him and bade him goodbye, after which I left the office, more perplexed in my mind than I had been for many a long day. Try how I would I could not penetrate the mystery. Mr. Farquharson was undoubtedly dead, for three people had seen him and were able to swear to that fact. He had instructed me to meet the messenger from London, and had given me the stamp which was to authorize him to deliver up the packet to me. Who, then, was this mysterious client for

whom it was intended? Could it have been the elder Mr. D'Iberville, and that it was to be revenged upon Mr. Farquharson that the murder had been committed and the documents stolen from my safe? But then again came the one question that seemed to upset everything. What had induced them to go back to the house after the murder had been discovered and abduct the body? Look at it how I would, the whole affair was as inscrutable as ever; and, for all I could see to the contrary, appeared likely to remain so. For the present, however, I had to dismiss it from my mind for the sake of the business which had brought me up to town. As it turned out, the appointment lasted longer than I had expected it would do, and five o'clock had struck before I bade the eminent counsel farewell. Tiring though the journey would be I was firmly resolved to return home by the midnight train, and this I did.

In order to be as comfortable as possible I engaged a sleeping compartment for as far as it could take me; but if I had thought I was going to rest I soon discovered that I was greatly mistaken. Hour after hour I lay in a sort of waking nightmare. Now old Mr. Farquharson, in counsel's wig and gown, would be advising me as to the law affecting real property, while the red-headed Saunders sat taking shorthand notes on a

high stool beside him. Then the D'Ibervilles would turn up on the scene and attempt to murder me for losing their precious packet, while Miss Christina looked on speechless with horror. Even the rattle of the wheels seemed to sing a song, the refrain of which was, "What did you do with that packet? What did you do with that packet? Deliver it up, deliver it up, young man! Deliver that packet!"

As a matter of fact we had left Nottingham behind us and were racing away north before I dropped into oblivion. When I woke again it was after eight o'clock, and we were nearing Carnforth, where it was necessary for me to change on to the branch line for Kendal and Windermere. I made my toilet with all speed; and presently found myself shivering on a wet and windy platform, with nearly an hour to wait before I could get on again. I had still a journey of upwards of two hours before me.

When I reached my destination I hired a carriage and started for home, having previously instructed the driver to call at my office *en route*. That my head clerk was surprised to see me may well be imagined. He had not expected me at the earliest until next day. The fact was, he regarded a journey to the metropolis as a serious matter. (Williams, I might here remark, had never visited

London in his life. In fact, I don't think he had ever travelled further south than Blackpool, the glories of which watering place he was never tired of describing to anyone who possessed the patience to listen to him).

"Have you any news for me?" I asked, for I was anxious to get home as quickly as possible.

"Nothing of importance, sir," he replied, and mentioned two or three trivial matters which he had been compelled to attend to in my absence.

"Very good then," I said, "I am going home. So if you want me, you will know where to find me."

I left him and drove on. It was a wretched morning, and the rain was falling in torrents. I was, therefore, by no means sorry when I found myself at my own front door. My mother and Miss Christina—the latter looking lovelier than ever—were crossing the hall as I let myself in.

"My dearest boy," cried the old lady, hastening forward to kiss me. "This is indeed a pleasant surprise. Is it not, Christina? We did not expect you back until to-morrow."

I glanced at the younger lady, and the blush that suffused her sweet face told me something I had dreamed of ever since I had known her, but had scarcely dared to think could come true.

"Yes, it is certainly a great surprise," she said, but woman like—for I am given to understand that they are all the same in such matters—she managed to throw into her voice just that little touch of coldness that was required to cast me back into the depths once more. But she did not guess, or what is more possible, she would not permit herself to think what it was that had brought me home again so soon. She little knew the revenge I was going to take upon her before very long.

That afternoon, quite by accident, I found her alone in my mother's conservatory, which led out of the drawing-room, and of which she had of late taken over the control. She was plucking dead leaves from some of the plants, and I told myself I had never seen a prettier picture than she presented at that moment. But then I always seemed to be finding new beauties in her. She looked shyly up at me and then down again at the plants before her, as if she divined what was coming.

"Christina," I said, "will you give me a flower?"

"With pleasure," she answered, and moved away to the further end of the place. "What will you have?"

In reply I gave utterance to the most romantic speech I have ever made in my life.

“ Well, if you want to know, I will tell you,” I said. “ I want the fairest and sweetest flower in this house. I want yourself. Christina, you must know how much I love you. I think I have done so ever since that moment when I found you seated on that boulder on the fellside. Will you trust yourself to me and be my wife? ”

There was no beating about the bush with her, and no pretended coyness. She turned and looked me in the face. From the moment I gazed into her eyes I knew that I had won her.

“ If you will have me I will be proud to be your wife,” she murmured, and held out her hands to me. I drew her to me by them and kissed her as a man kisses a woman but once in a lifetime. And so it was settled between us.

“ My dear children, are you never coming in to your tea? ” cried my mother’s voice from the drawing-room. “ How much longer are you going to stav talking there? ”

We went in, but Christina did not stay. She invented some excuse and fled to the solitude of her own room.

My mother came over to me and kissed me on both cheeks.

“ I see it all,” she said, and the tears stood in her dear old eyes. “ May the good God bless you both and give you every happiness.”

At this moment of all others, Hannah must needs enter the room with a telegram on a salver. I opened it and read as follows :—

Dennison,
Cudthorpe House,
Near Ambleside, Westmoreland.

Mr. Farquharson dying at my hotel,
Scottish Arms, Rathleigh—anxious to see
you and his granddaughter. Come at
once.—McGregor.

I handed it to my mother to read.

“ Good gracious ! ” was all she had the strength to say.

To me that seemed to be the only thing that could be said.

CHAPTER XII

THE amazing piece of intelligence which had so suddenly and so entirely unexpectedly been hurled in upon our happiness was certainly of that description which is so often classified as being "enough to take one's breath away." It seemed out of the question it could be true. That old Mr. Farquharson, whom we had all believed to have been brutally murdered, should be alive, and not only alive, but living in an obscure Scotch town, was preposterous to say the least of it. More than that, it was incredible. My first thought—when I could pull my wits together sufficiently to think of anything—was that I was being made the victim of a hideous practical joke. In all human probability there was no such inn in Rathleigh as "The Scottish Arms." My second was that someone must have known my connection with the now famous murder case, and for want of something better to do, had, in passing through the town, sent me the telegram, considering it an excellent piece of witticism.

Leaving my mother still staring at the paper through her spectacles, which, as usual, were perched on the extreme end of her nose, I hastened to my study in search of a tourists' guide. Having turned up Rathleigh, my doubts were set at rest once and for all; that it to say, so far as the identity of the hotel itself was concerned. There it was, set forth in plain type for all who ran, or walked, to read:—“*Hotels—‘The Claymore,’ High Street—H. Manton; ‘The Scottish Arms,’ Douglas Street—S. McGregor. Both well spoken of.*”

And then came up for consideration the next, and even weightier question. Was the telegram an attempt on the part of the Messieurs D'Iberville to obtain possession of Miss Christina? The younger man had told me of his fixed determination to make her his wife at any hazard, and perhaps he thought this would be the best way to accomplish his object. But then, again, there was this point to be considered: had they been anxious to do that, would they in that case have invited me to accompany her? At length I began to think that I saw a way out of the difficulty, and turning to my clerk, who was still waiting, I made him look for the law directory in the book case and turn up Rathleigh. While he was so occupied I

concocted a telegram which I thought might meet the situation.

"I have it, sir," he said, after a few moments' hunting, and handed the book to me, opened at the place in question. One glance at it was sufficient to tell me what I wanted to know: "Alexander Macpherson, writer, 13 Douglas Street." It was the same street in which "The Scottish Arms" was situated. I accordingly filled in his name and address on the top of the form and afterwards read it over to make sure that I had expressed myself quite clearly. In my message I had informed him that I had just learnt that a client, whom I had long supposed to be dead, was staying at "The Scottish Arms," and that his name was Farquharson. Would he be good enough to make enquiries concerning him and telegraph me as complete a description of him as possible? I brought my telegram to a conclusion with my name, profession and address, after which I handed it to my clerk, bidding him despatch it at once, and at the same time to pay for a reply.

When I had seen him depart I returned to the drawing-room in order to acquaint my mother with what I had done. To my astonishment, I discovered her still staring at the wire as if it possessed a fascination for her which she was unable to resist. I explained to her my fears and the course

of action I had adopted to guard against treachery, after which I suggested that we should abstain from saying anything to my darling concerning the news we had received until Mr. Macpherson's reply was to hand. She concurred with me, and then went off to interview the young lady herself. What transpired at their meeting I am not in a position to chronicle; the fact, however, remains that after a short interval they came down to the drawing-room together, my mother looking decidedly nervous, and Christina, if the truth must be told, giving the impression that she had been treating herself to that most feminine of all luxuries—a good cry. Though shy and scarcely able to look at me, she, however, soon cheered up, and in less than a quarter of an hour, so far as any outsider could have told to the contrary, all was going as merrily with us as the proverbial marriage bell.

With what impatience I awaited the reply to my wire I must leave you to imagine. The delay seemed interminable. Again and again I consulted my watch, but it was not until within a few minutes of our dinner hour that my ears caught the sound of the front door bell. I immediately hastened into the hall to find, as good luck would have it, that I was in time to open the door before old Hannah could reach it.

I was not destined to be disappointed, for the

new-comer proved to be no other than a shivering telegraph messenger. I took the envelope from him and tore it open. Surely the message was from Macpherson, and was worded as follows:—

“Farquharson staying ‘Scottish Arms’
—old man, long grey hair, about eighty—
afraid dying—doctor holds out no hope.”

After that I hesitated no longer. I told myself that Christina must be made aware of all that we knew, *and at once*, after which it must be left for her to say what course of action she proposed to adopt.

Dismissing the messenger, I called my mother into the study and read the telegram to her.

“It is imperative that Christina should be informed of what we have heard, and without delay,” I said, following up what I have said above. “Will you do it, dear? When she knows everything I will see her and endeavour to arrange matters to the best of my ability.”

“Very well, I will go to her at once,” was my mother’s immediate reply. “But, oh, Graham, how I wish all this had happened on another day. She will certainly wish to go to him, and you will have to accompany her, so I shall be left alone on the very day of all my life that I could have hoped you both would have been with me. I am a silly

old woman to talk like this. But there, there, I must not be so selfish as to consider my own happiness at such a moment."

"You are never selfish, mother dear," I answered. "You know as well as I do that you think of everyone else before you think of yourself. Now go to her, there's a kind soul, and break the news as gently as you can."

She left the room, and after she had gone I set to work, with the assistance of a "Bradshaw," to consider the matter of trains. As it turned out there proved to be only one which stopped at Rathleigh at night, and to catch that one it would be necessary for us to leave Windermere at ten o'clock, journeying by way of Kendal and Carnforth to Hellifield in order to join the main line for Scotland, a nice roundabout sort of journey for a poor young man who had travelled to London and back within the forty-eight hours. However, that was a question I could not stop to consider. I had my darling to think of, and if she wished to go north on this errand of mercy, it was surely not my place to complain if I were put to some inconvenience.

Ten minutes or so later my mother returned to the study in order to make her report. That she had been crying I could easily see, and I had not the slightest doubt that it was out of sympathy with my sweetheart that she had done so.

“ I have told her everything,” she said, with trembling lips, “ and she has come to the conclusion that she must go to the old man at once. I really think, Graham, it is her duty to do so. You see, he is the only relative she has in the world, and whatever the cause may have been that induced him to desert her, as he undoubtedly did, she nevertheless feels that she still owes him some return for all that he has done for her in days gone by. She has asked me to tell you this, as she has gone to her room to put up some things to take with her. From the wording of the two telegrams I should say that the case is most urgent, and that there is no time to be lost. It is hard upon you, my boy, to be called upon to undertake another long journey so soon, but I know you won't mind that when it is for her sake. What train do you think you will be able to catch? ”

I told her how I had worked it all out, and then asked her to warn Roberts that I should want him to be in readiness to drive Miss Farquharson and myself to Windermere Station in time to catch the ten o'clock train. When she had departed on her errand I sat down and wrote a note to Williams, in which I informed him that I had been unexpectedly called away to Rathleigh, and at the same time giving him the address of “ The Scottish Arms ” as that of the hotel I should put up at in

that town, in case he found occasion to communicate with me. An hour or so later, after an almost tearful farewell scene with my mother, my sweetheart and I were in her brougham on our way to Windermere and the north.

During the drive Christina was inclined to be silent, as I suppose was only natural, the circumstances which were causing the journey being taken into consideration. The pressure of her little hand in mine, however, told me that she was not unappreciative of the part that I was playing for her dear sake.

In due course we reached Hellifield, where I regret to say we had an hour to wait before the train from the south made its appearance. Then we settled ourselves down with rugs and footwarmers in order that we might be as comfortable as possible for the remainder of our journey. The station clock at Rathleigh showed us nine o'clock when we alighted from the train into which we had changed at Glasgow, and a jaded couple we must have looked as we entered the small omnibus which we chartered to convey us to "The Scottish Arms" Hotel. On our arrival there I introduced myself to the landlord, to whom I had already telegraphed, and learnt that Mr. Farquharson had spent a very bad night, and that the doctor, who had called twice and who was coming again in an hour's time,

held out no hopes of his living until the end of the day.

“He has been asking continually for you and the young lady, sir,” said the man, “but as I had heard nothing from you but your telegram that you had started, it was out of my power to satisfy him as to when you would actually be here. My wife saw the old body who is nursing him half an hour or so ago, and she told her that he had fallen into a bit of a doze, so before the doctor comes, perhaps you would like to rest a bit and have some breakfast.”

Christina declared that she could not touch a morsel of anything, but I would not hear of this, and at once fell in with the landlord's suggestion. We accordingly went to our respective rooms, after which we sat down to our meal in the quaint coffee room, with its oak panelling and old-fashioned furniture. It was past ten before the doctor made his appearance. He proved to be a queer little fellow, the possessor of a wig and the habit of taking snuff. Drawing him on one side, I asked his opinion concerning his patient.

“Ye're welcome to it, if it's any use to ye,” he said, “and I give ye my word, it's just this—the old man's done for. His heart is seriously affected and he may go off at any minute. To my thinking ye've only got here in the nick of time. When

I saw him this morning at three o'clock I thought the end had come for him, but somehow he managed to make a bit of a rally. They tell me he's had a sleep. I am going up to see him now. I'll let ye know what I think of him when I come down again. But, mark ye, ye must not build on it!"

He departed and I went back to Christina. It was no use my endeavouring to make her believe that things were better than they were; even had it been possible it would only have been false kindness on my part to have attempted to do so.

In something less than twenty minutes the little doctor reappeared.

"There is a decided rally," he said, "but whether it will last or not no man living can say. He is asking for ye baith, but I think ye had better see him one at a time. If the young leddie will kindly go first it would be as well, and above all, miss, do all ye can not to excite him. If ye will follow me I will take ye to him."

They departed and I sat down to await their return. Half an hour went by before Christina rejoined me. Her face, when she did so, was very pale, and I could see that it would not have needed very much to have reduced her to tears.

"The doctor thinks you had better wait for a quarter of an hour before seeing him," she said. "Oh, Graham, he looks simply terrible. My heart

bled for him, but I think he was pleased to see me, at least I hope that he was."

"If he loves you he could scarcely fail to be pleased," was my reply.

Presently the doctor returned and beckoned to me to follow him.

"For heaven's sake, mon, be careful," he whispered. "The interview with the young leddie has done him no good, and if ye excite him, I'll not say that I will be responsible for the consequences."

He took a prodigious pinch of snuff and led the way upstairs and along a corridor to a room overlooking the street.

"Now, remember what I have said to you, and don't keep him too long. Should I be wanted, ye'll find me downstairs talking to ye're sweetheart, and a bonnie lassie she is too, if I know anything about the sex."

Softly turning the handle of the door I entered, and the old nurse, who was standing beside the bed, bowed politely to me and crept quietly from the room.

Never shall I forget the figure I saw lying upon the bed. It was old Mr. Farquharson, but so changed that I scarcely knew him. Thin and frail he had always been; now, however, he was a shadow of even his former meagre self. His bones

seemed to be protruding through his skin, which was as white as to be almost transparent.

"Well, Mr. Graham Dennison," he said, in a voice a little above a whisper, "as you see, we meet again. You thought me dead; nevertheless, I'm dying. The doctor has warned me that I have not many hours to live, and upon my word, I hope he is right. I am sick of life, and my only desire is to be done with it. Before I go, however, I must have a talk with you. I have heard from Christina that you have asked her to marry you."

"And she has been good enough to consent to become my wife," I replied.

"Well, she's a good girl, and will make you a good wife. She will also be a rich woman."

"Rich or poor, she will always be the same to me," I said.

"Don't be a fool," he murmured. "Look at it how you will, money always sweetens love. It's adversity that, as often as not, kills it. You remember that packet I entrusted to your care, and which was stolen from your safe?"

"I have good reason to remember it," I answered bitterly, feeling that the time had come for me to explain my negligence.

He put his hand under the pillow and pulled from beneath it a large envelope, the contents of which he emptied on the coverlet of his bed.

“There they are,” he said, fingering the papers lovingly as he spoke. “Vouchers for money snugly invested to the value of close upon half a million pounds. They shall be Christina’s property as set forth in the will you drew for me. Marrying Christina will not prove a bad investment for you. You will be able to retire from the Law on such a sum.”

All my old suspicions flashed back upon me. I remembered the tale the younger D’Iberville had told me, and the curious fact stated by the lawyer in London, that Farquharson was not the name of the owner of the packet containing the all-important deeds.

“I thank you for your generosity,” I said, “but, if you will permit me to say so, I should like to know first how that amount of money was obtained. Certain things have come to my knowledge which have caused me more than a little uneasiness, and I could not accept, nor should I care that Christina, as my wife, should accept one halfpenny of the amount unless I were satisfied as to the source from which it was drawn.”

A flash of deadly rage was suddenly kindled in those hitherto lack-lustre eyes.

“You say you won’t take it,” he hissed, “and you think you’re going to dissuade her from doing so? Very well! We’ll see! Bring her to me.”

Seeing that the only probability of quietening him was to humour him, I accordingly went downstairs, and in due course conducted her to his bedside. He was still toying with his papers.

"Christina," he said—and I can only suppose that the rage which was consuming him had made his voice stronger than it had yet been—"it appears to me you are about to marry a fool."

"No, no, grandpapa," she answered loyally. "You must not say that. I know you do not mean it."

As she spoke she slipped her hand into mine.

"Don't dare to contradict me," he said. "I repeat he is a fool. Here is a fortune equal to half a million pounds sterling, and he refuses either to share it with you or to let you take it."

"If that be so," she answered, "I feel quite certain that he is right. At any rate I am prepared to abide by his decision."

Never shall I forget the look upon his face as he heard this. Doré could not have depicted such an expression of malignity.

"And to think that it is for this," he cried, "that I have gone in terror of my life; that I have braved such troubles as no man has any idea of." Then turning to me—"Once and for all, will you take it, or will you not?"

"It is for Christina to say," I replied. "For

my part, as I told you just now, I could not touch a penny of it until I knew how it had been obtained."

"And you, Christina?"

"Dear grandpapa, 'at the risk of giving you pain I must abide by Graham's decision."

"So be it!" and with trembling fingers he began to push the papers back into the envelope. "Call the nurse and doctor to me," he said, when he had finished.

I did so, and they entered the room together.

"Doctor, you are right after all," he said, "I shall not see the day out. But before you go, I want you to listen to a little story. It may, or it may not, prove worth hearing. Before I begin, however, I want you to give me some of that villainous medicine of yours. It may help me to say what I have to say."

The doctor moved to the little table beside the bed and poured him out a dose from the bottle, which the old man drank so fiercely that I thought he must choke if only by reason of his very eagerness. When he had recovered his breath, he said, still addressing the little doctor, "Go to the foot of the bed and listen. Nurse, come here to me!"

The old woman obeyed. She bent over him and he whispered something in her ear.

"Now all of you turn your backs to me."

To humour him we did as he wished, and half a minute or so later he bade us face him again. There was a blaze on the hearth.

“Look at that, doctor,” he said, pointing to the flames; “you may not believe it, but half a million pounds, which these young idiots have refused to accept because they don’t know where I gained it, is burning there. This girl, who believes herself to be my granddaughter—(here I clutched my darling’s hand tighter, for I did not know what was coming next)—is not my granddaughter at all. She is no blood relation to me. She is the granddaughter of a man who was once my friend, and whom I ruined. Her name is Farquharson, it is true, but mine is not. If you want to know who I am, my name is McDermott—John James McDermott—once known to the English and American police as ‘The Forger King.’ I stole this girl’s grandmother from her husband.”

Christina could not suppress a little cry.

“She died in New Orleans of fever,” he went on. “For a time I was inconsolable, and then I went back with a new zest to my villainies. I suppose there are some people who cannot derive any pleasure from wickedness. The elder of these D’Ibervilles, whom you know, Dennison, was a wealthy banker. I defrauded him of nearly a quarter of a million, most of which lies burning

on the hearth there. The balance of the amount was made up in very much the same way. Thus honesty goes to the wall, and fate arranges that the swindler shall prosper. The D'Ibervilles were ruined. They lost all they had in the world, and they determined to be revenged on me. Years went by and I heard nothing of them, but at last they found me out in South Africa. To elude them I travelled half round the world and eventually returned to Cape Town, where this girl, whose father had died in Australia, came to me. I had only heard by chance that she was an orphan, and, as I had always regretted the way I had treated her grandfather, which may possibly seem strange to you, I determined to take his name and adopt her. There was small risk of detection, for he had died a broken hearted man in South America. After many wanderings I reached England and deposited these papers for safe keeping with a firm of solicitors in London, who knew me under another name."

The mystery was solved !

"The D'Ibervilles once more discovered my whereabouts and also the hiding place of my wealth. I fled from London and hid myself in Westmoreland, and again they found me out. How to elude them I did not know, and, what was worse, I became frightened about the security of my papers.

To put them off the scent I arranged a plan whereby the deeds should be brought to me and deposited with this poor fool here, who has just refused to enjoy the benefits they could have bestowed upon him. One night the D'Ibervilles wrote me a letter, in which they gave me plainly to understand that unless I refunded what I had taken from them they would take my life. I was old and feeble, somewhat of a coward, I admit; yet, for this girl's sake, I was determined not to give in to them. I accordingly adopted an old trick, which, by the way, has served me well on several other occasions -- I deluged my bed with blood (not human blood), and faked a wound above my left breast. The ruse succeeded as I had always known it do. Everyone was taken in by it, and, while this girl went off to consult Dennison, I made my escape from the house, visited his office in the town, picked the lock of his strong room, as only I, with my experience, could do it, and possessed myself once more of my property. I knew that suspicion would fall on the D'Ibervilles, and I sincerely trusted they would be locked up for it. This, however, did not happen, though what has become of them I cannot say. One thing is quite certain, I have not seen them since. To keep out of their way I ran away and hid myself here in this little one-horse town; the rest you know. It is a pretty story, is

it not, doctor? It shows you a new side of human nature. As for you, my poor child," he continued, turning to Christina, "you have always done your best for me, and though, after hearing all this, you may not believe it, I have loved you. Nevertheless, as I have said before and say again, you are marrying a fool. Try to be happy with him. It may be difficult; well—but, take my advice, and if ever——"

We never knew what his advice would have been, for at that moment he suddenly sat up in bed, gave a little moaning cry, and fell back upon his pillows.

"This is the end," said the doctor, as he felt his pulse, and afterwards placed his hand upon his heart. "The excitement of the last two hours has done just what I thought it would do. He couldn't bear up against it."

I led Christina from the room.

And now you have heard all I have to tell you. Or perhaps, by way of bringing matters to a legitimate conclusion, I might add that the old man was buried a few days later in the churchyard of the town in which he died.

Of the D'Ibervilles I have never heard anything more, nor do I ever want to do so. My mother knows nothing of the story of which Christina knows too much, and we have settled it between ourselves that she never shall.

“My darling and I were married a month after the old man’s death. Since then our life has been one long happiness. Every day I grow to love her more, and we have agreed by mutual consent never to refer to one subject, and that is the life history of the “Old Man of the Crag.” There are some things which are better forgotten !

THE END

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